

Seeing Aceh from afar: A critical discourse analysis of Sharia law in BBC and CNN

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of Sharia law in the northernmost autonomous province of Aceh, Indonesia, has been widely discussed in international news outlets. This qualitative study explores how Sharia law is implemented in Aceh, as represented by BBC and CNN from afar. For these reasons, three BBC and CNN reports were analyzed using the three-dimensional framework (text, interpretation, and explanation) of the critical discourse analysis (CDA) model proposed by Fairclough. The findings indicate that BBC and CNN shaped negative representations of the implementation of Aceh Sharia law in their reporting. Furthermore, the findings expose that BBC and CNN reports utilized particular offensive language that damagingly characterize Aceh Sharia implementation as “draconian,” “abusive,” and “barbaric.” The BBC and CNN deficit discourse must be situated within diverse standpoints informed by CDA principles and media impartiality. In light of the findings, this study challenges the inadequately constructed deficit discourse and stigmatization of Aceh Sharia law’s image. It provides valuable suggestions for CDA lecturers and students, including media professionals, on adopting more astute language and applying CDA awareness to complex legal and cultural topics.

Keywords: Aceh Sharia law; BBC; CNN; critical discourse analysis; representation

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INTRODUCTION

Located in the northernmost tip of Sumatra Island, Aceh is an autonomous province with a long history of protracted conflict and is internationally known for its strong adherence to Islamic principles and the tsunami disaster (Armia, 2018; Budiono et al., 2022; Fujikawa, 2021; Sustikarini, 2019). Accordingly, Aceh is granted exclusive autonomy in the fields of education (Ilyas et al., 2019) and culture and religion (Sumardi et al., 2021). After the ratification of the MoU Helsinki between the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) and the Government of Indonesia (GoI), Aceh is allowed to apply the Law on Governance of Aceh (Aspinall & Chauvel, 2018; Barter & Wangge, 2021). In this regard, Sharia law authorization is one of the exclusive autonomy privileges granted to Aceh.

Sharia is frequently linked to Islamic law enforcement. The term Sharia primarily refers to the

legal tenets governing social and personal matters derived from Islamic ideals. Sharia essentially means "method" or "road", a route to be obeyed, stipulating what is allowed and what is prohibited. The Sharia principle comprises worship (*ibadah*), family (*ahwal syakhshiyah*), social relations (*mu'amalat*), criminal acts (*jinayah*), justice (*qadh*), education (*tarbiyah*), preaching (*dakwah*), and the protection of Islamic beliefs in Aceh as detailed in Article 125 of Law No. 11 of 2006 (Rani et al., 2020). This guideline has thus elicited mixed reactions in media reports (Din & Abubakar, 2021; Habiburrahim et al., 2020; Manan, 2020).

Some selected updates about Aceh’s Sharia law on the CNN and BBC websites have raised scholarly concerns. As international news companies, CNN and BBC are among the world’s most popular and influential public service

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broadcasters, including in Indonesia (Putra, 2024). Over the last five decades, CNN and BBC have been at the forefront of shaping the world's public sphere by providing wide-reaching coverage of world events, especially social and political perspectives (Morrison, 2021).

In this light, amidst the struggle to provide an actual account of the story, which is not always easy, it is impossible to give an entirely fair, accurate, and complete account of an event. Instead, the media represent events through language (spoken or written) and images (still or moving). Such representations are often restrained by space and time limitations; journalists need to prioritize particular events and certain people's perspectives or opinions over others. Furthermore, Chaidouli (2024) argued that political ideologies and media elites have an internal dynamic that makes them inseparable. Media, in the words of Yang (2023), plays a significant role in spreading political doctrines and shaping people's thoughts worldwide, including in debates over Aceh's implementation of Sharia law.

Research in Context: Media Reports on International Issues

The media has been one of the most effective communication tools, providing factual, meaningful information to our culture and society (Rustamova, 2019; Hodkinson, 2016). Numerous people receive information about world events from the media. The media offers verbal (spoken or written) and visual representations of the events (still or moving images). Such depictions are frequently constrained by space and time, as journalists must prioritize certain events, perspectives, or opinions over others. In addition, the priority can be influenced by journalists' political concerns or ideologies (Reynolds, 2019). Likewise, the media and ideologies are closely intertwined, making them inseparable (Fowler et al., 2018).

Consequently, the media has a significant effect on the spread of ideologies and on people's thoughts. Instead of serving as an objective, common-sense, or rational agent of social change, the media serve as propagandists for preconceived ideologies (Van Dijk, 2019). Since news reporting has become a reference for interpreting public issues, the power of the press, including newspapers, on readers is crucial in modern society. The techniques used to write newspaper articles on actual occurrences would enable influential readers to sympathize with or despise a particular "character" in the stories.

The Turner Broadcasting System, a subsidiary of Time Warner, owns the American cable and satellite TV station Cable News Network (CNN). CNN aims to be the global leader in online news and information (Piburn, 2021). In addition, another world-leading public service broadcaster is the

British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). It offers 10 state TV stations, local TV shows and regional TV programs, 40 local radio stations, 10 national radio stations, and a great website. The BBC is a state-funded news broadcaster in the United Kingdom (UK) and is financed by the license fee.

Generally speaking, CNN and BBC are viewed as the leading public service broadcasters globally (Gilboa et al., 2016). CNN and BBC significantly influence the news and television industries by shaping public opinion, ideology, framing, stereotyping, and portrayal (Wang, 2019). Lal (2019) further notes that the presence of CNN and the BBC, along with other nation-state broadcasters, has led to attempts to launch a state-branding campaign. Like in other parts of the world, CNN and BBC are known for their crisis reporting (Belair-Gagnon, 2015), international conflict (Moon, 2019), and international relations (Coban, 2016).

Critical Discourse Analysis in Media Discourse

Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) and Critical Linguistics (CL) are interchangeably used concepts in the field of the humanities. In reality, CDA now refers to CL, which seems to have recently gained favor (Mullet, 2018). In addition to the linguistic theory, which is profoundly inspired by the systemic functional grammar of Halliday (Banks, 2024), the CDA approach draws inspiration from Marx's conflict theory (Surber, 2018), Gramsci's hegemony theory (Donoghue, 2018), Althusser's theory of ideology (Beetz & Schwab, 2018), Habermas's communicative action approach (Wessler, 2019), Foucault's theory of ideology (Angermuller, 2018), and Bourdieu's theory of social class (Tichavakunda, 2018) to look at ideologies and power relations entailed in discourse. Because it is the main arena of ideological clash and a venue for power struggles, language is connected to the social world. The foundation of social representations of groups has been referred to as ideology. Van Dijk and Wodak's versions of CDA assume that social structures and historical components of discourse structures interact with socio-cognitive (Van Dijk, 2018).

In general, some concepts define CDA as a school or paradigm. For instance, all methods must be problem-oriented, cross-cutting, and diverse. Additionally, CDA is defined by shared goals of deciphering beliefs and supremacy through a methodical, retroactive analysis of semiotic material (written, spoken, or pictorial), along with maintaining their particular systematic techniques and being self-reflective about their inquiry processes. To put it briefly, CDA is a practical approach to analyzing language use to study societal complications, particularly concerns involving the abuse of authority and judgment (Baker & McGlashan, 2020).

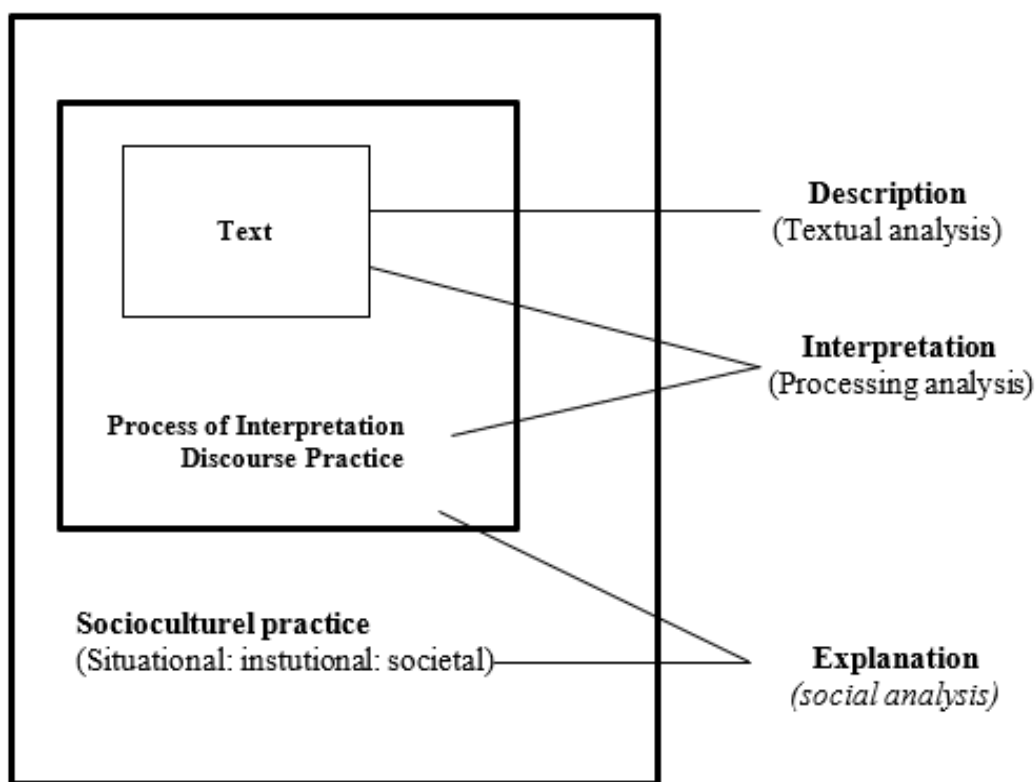
With regards to this study, Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework of CDA is more applicable as it provides a thorough close reading and a more adaptable framework. It can relate texts, co-texts, and contexts within wide-ranging discursive praxes and comprehensive social and cultural issues. Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive CDA, on the other hand, is very focused on the discourse participants’ perceptions and mind models, yet it overlooks the institutional reproduction of texts in revealing certain ideologies and power relations. Equally, Wodak’s emphasis on the historical aspects and intertextuality of the texts failed to uncover the hidden agenda-setting of social change and its socio-political dynamics.

Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis Model

This study used Fairclough’s CDA model for two main reasons. First, Fairclough was one of the founders of CDA and the earliest discourse analyst to develop and provide a general, widely used theoretical and transdisciplinary operational framework for studying media discourse (Fairclough, 1995, 2023). Second, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of CDA, as depicted in Figure 1, can incorporate close reading of texts alongside established ideologies, power, and macro-level political media routines. This is, to a certain degree, different from Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive model and Wodak’s historical approach (Van Dijk, 2018; Wodak, 2020).

Figure 1

Visual Representation of Fairclough’s CDA Framework (Fairclough, 1995).



Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2020) stated that CDA has three scopes: the text (description), discursive practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation). The linguistic examination of texts includes the textual dimension. The discursive practice component explains the natural surroundings of the text production and interpretation process, including the forms of discourse used and how they are integrated, including “discourses” in the academic sense. The social practice element is related to issues crucial to social examination, for instance, the institutional and organizational setting of the discursive occasion and how that affects the characteristics of the discursive repetition. Fairclough’s three-

dimensional ideals can be elaborated as follows: first, the description analysis is the phase concerned with the text’s formal properties at the word level (textual analysis). Second, the interpretation concerns the relationship between the text and communication, treating the text as a construction procedure and a source in the process of interpretation (processing analysis). Finally, the third explanation is about the relationship between communication and societal circumstances (social analysis).

Prior Studies, Research Gap, and Objective

Some prior studies have examined how the media reports on Aceh's implementation of Sharia law.

Habiburrahim et al. (2020), for example, analyzed the discourse on the application of Sharia law in Aceh from The Jakarta Post, an Indonesian English-language newspaper, and media reports. Their study revealed that the speakers' social identification and community ideology have a substantial impact on their public media statements. Moreover, Nurrahmi (2022) scrutinized the way *Serambi Indonesia* - a local daily newspaper based in Aceh owned by Indonesian *Kompas Gramedia Group* - generally framed the Sharia law implementation by using content analysis. Her findings indicate growing tension between the positive representation of Sharia law implementation and the Sharia flaws in the process.

Even though those studies have made meaningful contributions to media reports' scrutiny of Aceh Sharia law implementation, both studies have given little attention to how major Western media, especially the BBC and CNN, represented Aceh Sharia law implementation in their news reporting, using Fairclough's CDA three-dimensional model (1993). If Habiburrahim et al. (2020) work focused on the CDA approach by using speech act and implicature features proposed by Wodak (2015), and Nurrahmi (2022) concentrated on specific versus generic framing on media discourse promoted by Matthes and Kohring (2008) and Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), this study idiosyncratically aims to fill the gap to understand how Fairclough's model of description, explanation, and interpretation can offer another perspective on how CDA different frameworks operate in global media reports. Thus, the following question serves as the basis of our inquiry: how do CNN and BBC news portray Aceh's implementation of Sharia law?

It is expected that this study will offer a closer look at one of the most context-sensitive local and national issues, examining how Aceh Sharia law is discursively produced and reproduced by mainstream Western media in Indonesia. As such, critical awareness can be a valuable tool for more grounded media discourse. The link between the politics of representation can also be examined globally to advance scholarly critical discourse methods and tools in language and media studies.

METHOD

Research Design

This qualitative study aims to uncover deeper insights into the representation of Aceh Sharia Law in BBC and CNN news articles by using a CDA approach based on Fairclough's three-dimensional social change model. Fairclough's CDA model, in this context, intends to explore the causes and effects of social issues through the language used in BBC and CNN news reports. Using CDA as a qualitative research design can help reveal why and how particular language in the media is used to represent ideological tensions and social disparities.

Data Sources

To bring together the data, which is in written form, the articles were taken from CNN and BBC news coverage published between 2010 and 2019, using the keyword "Aceh Sharia law". There are several main justifications behind the time frame. First, this period was marked by international media attention as criminal law (*qanun jinayah*) was strongly enforced. During this period, the heated discussion following the end of post-tsunami reconstruction in 2010 revolved around LGBT and human rights, which became intensified, as pro-Sharia mayors and regents rose to prominence in Aceh during the period. Second, this period was justified because it provides more data and a stable representation for finding articles suited to the selected topics. Last, 2019 was the year before 2020-2022, when media reporting shifted to focus more on the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inclusion Criteria

Three CNN articles and three BBC articles were purposively included based on a set of criteria. First, the selected CNN and BBC news articles were deemed relevant to the research objective because they covered the implementation of Aceh Sharia law. Second, the data were sufficient to analyze the chosen topic and the news perspectives on two main issues: LGBT/adultery and flogging/canning. These issues were selected to accommodate most major Western reports on human rights violations under Sharia law.

Data Collection Procedure

This study focused on three BBC and three CNN articles. The articles were taken from their official website search engine. We coded it as B1 (BBC News Article 1), B2 (BBC News Article 2), and B3 (BBC News Article 3) for BBC news articles, and C1 (CNN News Article 1), C2 (CNN News Article 2), and C3 (CNN News Article 3) for CNN news articles. The details of the analyzed news articles are listed in Table 1.

Data Analysis

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, which examines text (spoken or written), discursive practice (text production and consumption), and sociocultural practice, was used in the analysis. Fairclough's three-dimensional model consists of three stages: description, interpretation, and explanation. These are used to study three elements in a text: the text (spoken or written), the discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), and the sociocultural practice (situational, institutional, and societal).

Two main steps were engaged in the analysis procedure. In the first stage of text analysis, an in-depth textual analysis of the representation of Aceh's Sharia law application was conducted using

Fairclough’s model, using the six selected articles from BBC and CNN news. Each article will undertake a close reading, seeing that the way people use language is revealed and motivated by eventual social and political aims, irrespective of the author/speaker’s choices. Excerpts from the articles

were made available to provide ample evidence of how journalists’ and news agencies’ assessments construct, uphold, and justify particular ideological patterns. Keywords from the article’s extracts were bolded and emphasized to expose the entangled political motivation in the news.

Table 1
Details of Articles from BBC and CNN

No.	Title of The News	Edition	Link to The News	Code
1.	No place to hide for LGBT people in Indonesia’s Aceh province	May 24th, 2017	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40024204	B1
2.	Indonesia Floggings: Aceh Public Punishments Condemned	25 October, 2017	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41746536	B2
3.	Indonesia’s Islamic Laws are ‘Abusive’, Report Says	December 1st, 2010	https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-11883781	B3
4.	Man who advocated caning for adultery gets caned for adultery	November 1st, 2019	https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/01/asia/indonesia-adultery-caning-scli-intl/index.html	C1
5.	Gay Men, Adulterers Publicly Flogged in Aceh, Indonesia	July 15th, 2018	https://edition.cnn.com/2018/07/14/asia/indonesia-banda-aceh-public-m-flogging-intl/index.html	C2
6.	‘Never seen anything like this’: Inside Indonesia’s LGBT Crackdown	June 1st, 2017	https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/31/asia/indonesia-lgbt-rights/index.html	C3

The making of the discursive practice interpretation was accomplished at the second stage of Fairclough’s model. Each article was analyzed grounded on interdiscursivity, intertextual claims, and intertextuality. Within the scope of interdiscursivity, the text varied according to the intended audience and purpose, as it was methodically dissected into genre, tenor, mode, and dimension. The main message in the context of intertextual claims is whether the texts or articles are produced by which media platform and how they are distributed internationally via online or offline modes of communication.

Sociocultural practice is the third stage of analysis. The relationship between interaction and social context was made clear in social analysis. This facilitated the discovery of the critical pragmatism to provide adequate dialectical reasoning. Then, the social analysis considered the social, political, and cultural contexts in which language and power collide, and it explained the existing, socially determined, and cumulative aspects shaping humans’ social behavior in the carefully chosen articles.

FINDINGS

The Image of Aceh Sharia Law Implementation using Fairclough’s model

Textual Analysis (Description)

At the textual level, the findings reveal that the BBC and CNN reports in the selected articles consistently rely on specific linguistic strategies in their portrayal of Aceh’s Sharia law implementation. Negative lexical choices from the BBC, such as conservative, barbaric, and abusive, are used to describe Aceh as intrinsically radical, uncivilized, and harsh. Equally similar, CNN demonstrates deliberate insertion of emotive wordings such as draconian, threat, arbitrary, and dangerous by exploiting polarized and

antagonistic views between Aceh and the Eastern cultures and the Western values. As a result, the BBC and CNN reported the events by enthusiastically promoting divisive interpretations through discursive repetition, stereotype reinforcement, and hegemonic legitimization. The following sections will provide additional examples of how BBC and CNN present the image of Aceh’s Sharia law implementation in the first dimension of textual analysis, based on the selected news articles.

BBC Article 1

In the article 1 (BBC News Article 1 “No Place to Hide for LGBT People in Indonesia’s Aceh Province”), the journalist branded Aceh, the only Indonesian province adopting the Sharia law, as being conservative, meaning opposed to change or modernization, and always upholding old principles. In fact, Zulfadli et al. (2020) underline that they viewed the decision to implement the Sharia law in Aceh as a means to reinforce religious “conservatism”.

“Two gays were openly caned in **conservative** Indonesian province of Aceh.” (1)

“The police urinated on my head and beat the two of us up, we were **treated like animals**,” he recalls. (12)

Furthermore, the journalist stages the news by providing revengeful testimonies from several LGBT figures against the local government and the Sharia law. This effectively delivers a damaging impression on the implementation of the Sharia law in Aceh, as most Western media are very sympathetic to the LGBT community’s presence (Kian, 2019). The BBC report features protagonists (the Aceh local government) and antagonists (the LGBT activists).

BBC Article 2

As exemplified in Article 2 BBC News Article 2 “Indonesia Floggings: Aceh Public Punishments Condemned”, the journalist used the word “barbaric” as an analogy to the Sharia law in Aceh.

“Human Rights Watch called on the country’s president to end the **barbaric** punishment”. (1)

“Barbaric” is a word that denotes a group of uncivilized people. It originated in ancient Greece, where it was initially a solitary conversation about a foreign citizen who did not speak Greek (Harrison, 2020). In the abovementioned excerpt, the journalist attempts to persuade the reader that Sharia law is harmful by using the word “barbaric.” In this light, such lexical choice is a construction of “negative-others” discourse toward the distant society (Baider & Kopytowska, 2017; Moen-Larsen, 2020).

BBC Article 3

In BBC News Article 3, “Indonesia’s Islamic Laws are ‘Abusive’, Report Says”, the journalist cited the Human Rights Watch (HRW) report as follows.

“Islamic laws applied in the Indonesian province of Aceh violate people’s rights and are implemented **abusively**”. (1)

The journalists use “implemented abusively” to portray how Sharia law limits the Acehnese’s liberty in their everyday life. The word abusive is so strong that it conveys insults, derogation, and other negative prejudices (Caselli et al., 2020). The journalists try to profile new prejudices regarding Sharia law. The term “violate people’s rights” means that the Sharia law is not accepted by society for its heavy-handed nature. Stereotyping, instead of prototyping, is often ingrained in portraying a negative image to other religions like Islam (Siddiqui et al., 2022).

CNN Article 1

The journalist in CNN Article 1, entitled CNN News Article 1: “Man Who Advocated Caning for Adultery Gets Caned for Adultery” used the word “draconian” as an analogy to the Sharia law in Aceh. According to the Cambridge dictionary, draconian means very severe or goes further than what is proper or necessary. Draconian means “of great severity” derived from Draco, an Athenian homicide law inscribed under whom insignificant errors had heavy verdicts where the law is said to be written with blood instead of ink (Britannica, 2020).

“An Indonesian man has been publicly flogged for adultery under a draconian law.” (1)

By using this word, CNN points out that Islamic Sharia is an extraordinarily harsh and unsympathetic law that resembles a draconian law. Hapal (2021) viewed this as a “disciplining strategy,” or, as Timotijevic (2020) puts it, as

silencing dissenting opinions. The news similarly describes the “discordant emotions” of the Aceh local government in handling the LGBT movement (Thajib, 2022). Elyas and Aljabri (2020) found that the reporter’s language, such as the “motion frenzy” and “otherness” images of non-Western entities, implied that they were inferior.

CNN Article 2

In sentences 16 and 19, as reported in CNN News Article 2 “Gay Men, Adulterers Publicly Flogged in Aceh, Indonesia” below, the journalist used “strict” as an adjective to describe Sharia law implementation in Aceh. They also use words such as “harassment”, “arbitrary arrest”, and “threats of torture”. Such a textual construct is defined by Dietrich and Murdie (2017) as “the shaming effect,” a discourse strategy of discrediting others and appealing for attention.

“Aceh province follows strict Islamic laws, which make sexual activity outside marriage and same-sex relations illegal.” (16)

Similarly,

“The HRW states that LGBT people in the state “live in a spiraling climate of fear ... (and) face ever-present harassment, arbitrary arrests and detention by Sharia (Islamic law) and municipal police, and threats of torture.” (19)

CNN Article 3

In CNN News Article 3 “Never Seen Anything like This’: Inside Indonesia’s LGBT”, the journalist picked the word “dangerous” to exemplify how Sharia law negatively impacts the LGBT community. Equally, this way of thinking is driven by the typical misleading conception that the accused human rights violations by the Acehnese government in Indonesia are legitimized with the use of the “never seen anything like this” phrase.

“In less than 18 months, being gay in Indonesia has gone from widely tolerated to just plain dangerous”. (1)

Processing Analysis (Interpretation)

At this stage, the second dimension of Fairclough’s CDA, namely the processing analysis or interpretation, scrutinizes the way texts are produced, reproduced, disseminated, and interpreted in meticulous discursive parameters. The analysis goes beyond pure linguistic meaning to interaction with institutionalized newsroom practice in meaning-making operationalization. As shown in Tables 2 to 7, the elements of interdiscursivity (genre, tenor, mode, and dimensions), intertextual claims, and intertextuality (representation and presupposition) are thoroughly presented in the tables of the selected articles from the BBC and CNN.

Table 2

Processing analysis on article B1

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	Written, prepared, and argumentation
	Dimension of text	Topic: LGBT community in Aceh Area of knowledge: Reports and information about the LGBT community in Aceh Province
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform BBC News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about how the LGBT community feels worried about the Sharia Law implemented in Aceh.
	Presupposition	Bring out the opinions of the LGBT community towards Aceh Sharia Law implementation.

Table 3

Processing analysis on article B2

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	Written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: Aceh public punishment Area of knowledge: Report and information about public flogging punishment for violating Sharia law
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform BBC News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about the Sharia law violation punishment in Aceh.
	Presupposition	Shows the implementation of caning for violations of Islamic Sharia law, and its pros and cons

Table 4

Processing analysis on article B3

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	Written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: Islamic Laws are "abusive." Area of knowledge: Reports and information on Sharia law that were implemented abusively
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform BBC News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about Aceh Sharia law implementation, which is claimed to be "abusive."
	Presupposition	Bring out the report and information based on the HRW report.

Table 5

Processing analysis on article C1

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: An Indonesian man who helped set strict adultery laws was flogged for adultery. Area of knowledge: Reports and information on Sharia law that were implemented abusively
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform CNN News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about a man who worked for an organization that helped draft strict adultery laws, has been publicly whipped after being caught having an affair with a married woman.
	Presupposition	Brings out the information about a man who helped set strict adultery laws flogged for adultery as a huge irony

Table 6

Processing analysis on article C2

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: The journalist presents how the punishment with public caning was conducted Area of knowledge: Report and information about public caning punishment, including two men whipped for homosexuality
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform CNN News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about the punishment for offenses, including adultery, gay sex, and drinking.
	Presupposition	Brings out the information about the strict Islamic law that restrains society and angers some groups.

Table 7

Processing analysis on article C3

Interdiscursivity	Genre	News report
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: LGBT crackdown and existence Area of knowledge: The journalist presents how the LGBT community is accepted by society and the government.
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of the online news media platform CNN News and distributed to readers all over the world.	
Intertextuality	Representation	The text is vocalized about the strict Islamic laws, which make adultery and homosexuality illegal.
	Presupposition	Brings out the information that, in the strict implementation of Sharia law, most Indonesians refused to accept homosexuality.

The dimension of processing analysis or interpretation uncover consistent patterns of interdiscursivity in BBC and CNN news articles, in which all tables indicate the dominance of hard news reporting genre, placing the journalists as authoritative source of discourse in tenor and used mostly written and prepared mode that emphasizing evaluative interpretation with public caning, LGBT's treatment, and the stringency of Islamic law are among the recurrent topics. As for the intertextual claims, it reinforces media institutions' authority as international news agencies. In the component of intertextuality, representation is asserted through moral judgment, irony, and narratives of ill-treatment, while the punitive nature of Sharia law perceptively normalizes presupposition.

Social Analysis (Explanation)

In the last dimension of Fairclough's CDA, the social analysis or explanation found that both the BBC and CNN news portray Aceh's Sharia law implementation as a common enemy and a cultural menace that violates human rights. Both media institutionalized the discourse that Western values are more dominant than Aceh and its Eastern cultures. The selective source of the Human Rights Watch report justifies their one-sided evaluation that Aceh and its Sharia are incompatible with Western

democracy. The use of condemnation with moralized lexical selection in BBC reports and CNN intensifier of irony framing and social regressive claim

BBC Article 1

A general thread is that the BBC's news is closely aligned with media ideology. Somehow, the BBC's journalists drive the international readership to perceive Sharia law in Aceh as a global threat. It weighs on the idea that Aceh's Sharia law implementation violates basic human rights principles, as part of an institutionalized political structure that allows such abuses to occur (Hakim, 2020).

The social, political, and cultural situation, as reflected in the linguistic choices in the news article, is embodied in several word choices (e.g., "conservative," "treated like animals") in the discourse. In the eyes of Holmes and Wilson (2017), these facets are enacted through lexical choices that construct reality and endorse a particular type of social identity. This also explains that the tension between the LGBT community and the Aceh government that enforces Sharia law is obvious (Adhiyatma & Hyun, 2017).

BBC Article 2

The news article "Indonesia Floggings: Aceh Public Punishments Condemned" has an explicit purpose.

The BBC's denunciation of Sharia law can be seen in the well-known international NGOs featured in the news. Thereby, BBC applies the "the sourcing" discourse strategy, a term coined to dehumanize the targeted culture through such depictions (Rowley & Johnson, 2018).

BBC Article 3

As we shall see from the data, the social aspects of news articles categorically portray the BBC's standpoint against Sharia law. Also, Reisigl (2017) advocates the use of guidelines for non-discriminatory languages as part of the CDA approach.

CNN Article 1

The journalist steers public opinion to blame Sharia. A man who helped set strict adultery laws was flogged for adultery, a great irony. This sentence hypothetically reveals a loophole in Aceh's Sharia law implementation, leading to a negative image in CNN news reporting. In view of this, Musolff (2017) argues that irony is a way to express implicit negative commentary about something the person dislikes or discredits.

CNN Article 2

CNN's partisanship towards the LGBT community can be seen in the reported news. The journalist creates a conception that implementing the Sharia law in Aceh is unsafe for the LGBT groups and their movement. In the social, political, and cultural context of the linguistic aspects of the news article, the journalist cites the HRW report as clear evidence of "deficit discourse" in media mainstreaming. According to Hogarth (2018), "deficit discourse" is a widespread practice of explicitly targeting indigenous people for being traditionalists.

CNN Article 3

Regarding the social analysis, it is found that the journalist's interpretation of Aceh Sharia law implementation is a menace to LGBT freedom. It can be seen how the journalist presents testimony from a notable LGBT activist and cites the HRW report in the news. Most of the testimony revealed a one-sided view of Sharia law in Aceh. In the social, political, and cultural context of the linguistic aspects used in the news article, the journalist presents an anti-LGBT activist demonstration in Yogyakarta to show that homosexuality is unacceptable in Indonesia, and this is not good for democracy, universal values, and human rights activism. Thus far, the journalist mistakenly portrays the Indonesian government, rather than the Aceh provincial government, as becoming dangerously intolerant. Rezaei et al. (2019) believe that this unfounded and poorly constructed representation of Islam, fear, and violence has become so entrenched in Western media.

DISCUSSION

The three stages of text analysis in Fairclough's model start with the text analysis (description) of the vocabulary and rhetorical devices used in BBC and CNN news. It can be assumed that all news coverage represented the oppressive implementation of Sharia law in Aceh through various linguistic choices. The journalists used unfavorable terms to describe the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh, for instance, "strict," "discriminatory," and "abusive." This finding similarly echoes Mann and Afrianty's (2020) understanding that the implementation of Sharia law is widely believed to "formalize discrimination" under the law. As Esposito (2024) elaborates, CDA theory, methods, and practice can help explore inequalities within society and institutional practice.

The second level of processing analysis (interpretation) involves critical scrutiny of the production and reproduction of discourse to determine how those processes relate to the text that is being produced. All news articles are viewed as the medium through which the BBC and CNN journalists sought to voice their dissent to the audience regarding the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh. The news coverage, for example, discussed the victim's experiences within the "strict" Aceh Sharia law application. In particular, the Sharia keyword is seemingly perceived as hostile to Western culture, generating much attention to the underpinnings of these perceptions. Kurebwa and Muchakabarwa (2021) deem that this fallacy is driven by a negative atmosphere surrounded by intense Islamophobic images and rhetoric in reporting the news.

The social analysis (explanation) level is the final piece in Fairclough's CDA model. It analytically explained how discourse relates to social, political, and cultural realities, rather than relying solely on reproduced facts and reported truths. The reported "conservative" Sharia law enforced in Aceh province was reported to the global readership by BBC and CNN news agencies. However, under any circumstances, the BBC and CNN did not take the opinions of the Acehnese into account and simply overlooked the "cover both sides" principle in media discourse. Therefore, as Fairclough and Fairclough (2018) reiterate, this could jeopardize the communication ethics in the increasingly mediatized world. In reality, the news construction of BBC and CNN journalists is trivial, as it frames an unrealistically consistent pattern of "distant" and "isolated" culture from a simplified outsider point of view. In this light, Van Dijk's (2024) ideological square of "positive self" and "negative others" is relevant for explaining how media discourse frames other cultures and entities, especially in the wake of the radical right.

It should be added that this short-sighted representation was made possible in large part by

the absence of Acehnese perspectivization as insiders on what is probably the most fundamental issue of their everyday lives. The role of the media, particularly the Western media, in shaping global public opinion on the implementation of Aceh Sharia law in Indonesia, for instance, is highly political and unfair. In the realm of political discourse, Chilton (2023) demonstrated that language and politics can also be demagoguery, promoting prejudices rather than engaging in rational, fair argument. Bearing this in mind, this is similar to what Miladi (2021) found in his study, that the embedded “terrorism” frame has lost its genuine importance from the majority of Islamic discourse available. Such widely circulated negative propaganda about faraway and foreign religions, identities, and beliefs is conceivably grounded in Waytz et al.’s (2019) critical reflection on the “ideology of difference”. In addition, as news in the

media moved to the online format, our findings unearth how misinformation takes place in the quickly evolving generated content coming from every direction, not only from readers but, unsurprisingly, also from journalists at well-established media organizations. Donovan and Boyd (2021) claim this occurrence is a “strategic amplification” practice in media networks engulfed by divisive rhetoric.

Textual Analysis (Description)

Fairclough (2017) states that this is the first component of dialectical reasoning in politically motivated text analysis. This component explains the linguistic choices made in the news articles. From the data, we learned that all news articles portrayed the alleged arrogant application of Sharia law in Aceh Province, using a variety of lexical phrases, as shown in Table 8.

Table 8.
Text Analysis Discussion Table

No.	News Title	Code	Information
1.	No place to hide for LGBT people in Indonesia’s Aceh province	B1	“Two gay men were publicly caned in the conservative Indonesian province of Aceh” (Line 1)
2.	Indonesia Floggings: Aceh Public Punishments Condemned	B2	“Human Rights Watch called on the country’s president to end the barbaric punishment ”. (Line 1)
3.	Indonesia’s Islamic Laws are ‘Abusive’, Report Says	B3	“Islamic laws applied in the Indonesian province of Aceh violate people’s rights and are implemented abusively ” (Line 1)
4.	Man who advocated caning for adultery gets caned for adultery	C1	“An Indonesian man has been publicly flogged for adultery under a draconian law .” (Line 1)
5.	Gay Men, Adulterers Publicly Flogged in Aceh, Indonesia	C2	“Aceh province follows strict Islamic laws , which make sexual activity outside marriage and same-sex relations illegal.” (Line 22)
6.	‘Never seen anything like this’: Inside Indonesia’s LGBT Crackdown	C3	“In less than 18 months, being gay in Indonesia has gone from widely tolerated too just plain dangerous ”. (Line 1)

Each article on BBC and CNN coverage begins with a straightforward assertion or strong proposition. The message was conveyed to readers through lengthy sentences and headlines to captivate them about the law endorsed in Aceh, using powerful adjectives such as “conservative,” “barbaric,” “implemented abusively,” “draconian,” “strict Islamic laws,” and “dangerous.”

As shown in the table above, the journalists attempted to persuade the reader by proposing overtone news titles at the outset, for instance, “no place to hide,” “public punishment,” “abusive,” “publicly flogged,” and “never seen anything like this”. The journalists use these to appeal to the reader’s interest and encourage them to read more about their version of the stories. Although Stubb’s (2018) analysis does not specifically address news agencies’ media practices, she underscores an important point: the emerging appeal of storytelling (story) over an informational message strategy (info) in online media settings. Another tactic by journalists is to emphasize the inclusion of numerical figures or numbers used in their news coverage to intensify the message’s impact on the readers. For example, “more than 500 people have

been publicly flogged,” according to article B2, and “In less than 18 months,” according to article C3, were evidence of the magnification of the impact of journalists’ thoughts and ideologies in the stories. The journalists’ attempt to portray Sharia as an outdated law applied in Aceh has failed to resolve the real problems in society. In that case, rather than enlightening readers through multiple sources of information, objectivity, and fact-checking, modern journalism can fall into the trap of failing to deliver on its promise of truth, resorting to negative propaganda and misrepresentation by single-handedly deploying the “illusion of truth” in the news-making process (Majin, 2021).

Processing Analysis (Interpretation)

A critical analysis of discourse practices tracks knowledge production and reproduction in social systems, including news-making processes under the rubric of interdiscursivity. It demonstrates the connection between the text and discourse as dialectical reasoning (Fairclough, 2017). For the recipients’ interpretations of the message, the text serves as the main data source for the message’s interpretations. The interpretation, according to

Marissa (2020), can be both dialectical and relational, whereby the social contexts can help capture the influence of ideologies in a particular context. Likewise, Wodak (2020) repeatedly argues that the rise of the politics of denial is a direct result of failing to understand the historical repertoire that

contextualizes the process of analysis and interpretation. Table 9 focuses on the process of manifesting intertextuality (representation, presupposition, and metadiscourse), intertextual claims, and interdiscursivity (genre, tenor, mode, and text dimension).

Table 9.
Processing Analysis Discussion Table

Interdiscursivity	Genre	All genres of the text are news reports.
	Tenor	Journalists of the news articles to the readers
	Mode	Written, prepared
	Dimension of text	Topic: Aceh Sharia Law Area of knowledge: Report and information about Sharia Law implementation in Aceh Province
Intertextual claims	Texts are produced by journalists of online news media platforms, BBC News and CNN News, and distributed to readers all over the world	
Intertextuality	Representation	Text is vocalized on how Sharia Law is implemented in Aceh
	Presupposition	Bring out the opinions of the conservative Aceh Sharia Law implementation.

The process of text production underscores the importance of intertextuality, as texts were also produced in audio and video formats. Journalists prepared news for different media platforms and distributed it across media company networks. This is what is often called intertextuality, where Velykoroda and Moroz (2021) describe how text argumentation across different platforms tends to define rather than replace them. As for intertextuality, the text supposedly foregrounds local context and historical relevance in its interpretation. Only in such a way, text may find its authenticity, originality, and intertextuality at the same time (Kučera & Chovanec, 2022). Eventually, the text's intertextuality can be drawn on to inform pro or con Sharia law exposures, opinions, and narratives as part of established or alternative interpretations of the case to understand the source culture pragmatically (Long & Yu, 2020).

Social Analysis (Explanation)

Discourse and social, political, and cultural realities are closely related to the data analysis at this stage. The immediate context in which a text develops is crucial to accurate interpretation, yet this context seems to be missing from journalists' accounts of the issues. Our findings show that language selection and specific words do not accurately reflect the context in which the text is produced. Obviously, these news stories discussed the conservative law enacted in Aceh in an unusual way. The journalists producing the news articles are outsiders whose knowledge about the context is limited. Thus, it is evident that the journalists have little or no understanding of how Sharia law is applied or should be applied. They might even write stories and reports by quoting secondary and third sources. Steensen et al. (2022) believe that "source criticism" must be an instrument to revisit truth-claims judgment in media discourse.

Recurringly, they did not consider how the Acehese people and government perceived this specific law. They preferably wrote based on their unverified assumptions about Sharia law. Manan and Salasiyah (2022) found that Acehese perspectives on Sharia law implementation range from accusing the government of failing to properly implement the law to reporting positive changes in life. In this light, Zeman (2020) reminds us that the need to communicate particular narratives has created a "perspectivization" mechanism in which language is used as a medium to persuade others. This might seem inevitable amid the tendency to embrace news material from social media platforms, which can reduce news credibility and promote misinformation and fake news (Christensen & Khalil, 2023; Igwebuikwe & Chimuanya, 2021) when reporting from afar.

CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to analyze critical discourse about the enactment of Sharia law in Aceh, as represented in BBC and CNN news coverage. Fairclough's three-dimensional framework model is used to examine the selected news articles. The findings showcase the negative portrayal of Aceh's Sharia law implementation by two popular, internationally recognized Western media broadcasters. BBC and CNN use derogatory language to represent the Acehese Sharia law as an evil and uncivilized distraction from modernity. All the blame is placed on the shoulders of the government, the Islamic law, the culturally religious traditions of the Acehese people in particular, and the Indonesian unique democracy and tolerance in general. While such a premise may have merit, it predictably led to the overgeneralization of the inadequately constructed implication stemming from the embedding logical fallacy about Aceh and

Indonesian Islam. With this in mind, this study has attempted to make a theoretical contribution to critical discourse analysis (CDA) and to the Fairclough model of global media discourse, focusing on discursive practices surrounding the implementation of Sharia law in Aceh, especially on how the language of the newspaper is misconstrued. In practice, promoting ethical journalism and meticulous gatekeeping on religiously complex issues can advance a more balanced news reporting. Based on a review of our current findings, it leads to the conclusion that the BBC and CNN news agencies are best described as having a hidden agenda that can be actualized to varying degrees across international readership and global news production. Future studies could extend the CDA analysis by using larger corpora of news reporting from additional major Western and non-Western media outlets to provide a more negotiated representation of media discourse.

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