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HOW BBC CONSTRUCTS TRUTH: TRANSITIVITY AND MODALITY IN SUDAN CONFLICT

Hanifah Oktarina[1], Syihabuddin[2], Mahardhika Zifana[3]
[1,2,3](Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia)
hanifahoktarina@stain-madina.ac.id[1],
syihabuddin@upi.edu[2],
dhika.zifana@upi.edu[3]

ABSTRAK: Perang saudara Sudan, yang ditetapkan oleh Perserikatan Bangsa-Bangsa sebagai krisis kemanusiaan terbesar di dunia, telah menghasilkan liputan media internasional yang luas namun masih kurang dikaji secara kritis dalam kajian wacana mengenai bagaimana pengetahuan tentang konflik dibangun dan suara siapa yang berwenang untuk mendefinisikan kebenaran. Studi ini menggunakan Linguistik Fungsional Sistemik (SFL) yang terintegrasi dengan Analisis Wacana Kritis untuk menyelidiki bagaimana BBC Indonesia dan BBC International membangun distribusi agensi dan otoritas epistemik dalam artikel penjelasan tentang konflik Sudan. Melalui analisis transitivitas dan modalitas kualitatif dari dua artikel yang sebanding pada November 2025, penelitian ini mengkaji bagaimana pilihan linguistik mengungkapkan posisi ideologis mengenai siapa yang bertindak, siapa yang menderita, dan pengetahuan siapa yang dianggap sah. Temuan menunjukkan pola sistematis di kedua media tersebut, yaitu konstruksi pasif dan nominalisasi mengaburkan tanggung jawab aktor militer atas korban sipil; atribusi agensi asimetris membangun RSF sebagai agresor kekerasan sementara dimensi struktural menjadi tidak terlihat; Hierarki epistemik tiga tingkat memberikan keistimewaan pada suara-suara institusional Barat (AS, HRW) dengan modalitas yang definitif, memberikan otoritas investigasi kepada badan-badan internasional (PBB), sementara merendahkan suara-suara lokal Darfur ke posisi subjektif berdasarkan keyakinan. Yang penting, pola-pola ini bertemu terlepas dari posisi geografis media, regional Indonesia versus global Inggris, mengungkapkan apa yang diidentifikasi Foucault sebagai "kekuatan kapiler": sirkulasi kerangka pengetahuan yang berpusat pada Barat melalui norma-norma jurnalistik yang terinstitusionalisasi yang melampaui bias individu atau kepentingan nasional. Konvergensi ini menunjukkan bahwa transformasi representasi konflik tidak hanya membutuhkan diversifikasi sumber media tetapi juga secara fundamental menantang "rezim kebenaran" yang tertanam yang menentukan pengetahuan siapa yang dapat diakui sebagai sah dalam jurnalisme global, dengan implikasi yang meluas melampaui pelaporan konflik Afrika ke pertanyaan yang lebih luas tentang keadilan epistemik di media internasional.

Kata kunci: *Artikel BBC, analisis wacana kritis, modalitas, konflik sudan, transitivitas*

ABSTRACT: The Sudan civil war, designated by the United Nations as the world's largest humanitarian crisis, has generated extensive international media coverage yet remains critically under-examined in discourse scholarship regarding how conflict knowledge is constructed and whose voices are authorized to define truth. This study employs Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) integrated with Critical Discourse Analysis to investigate how BBC Indonesia and BBC International construct agency distribution and epistemic authority in explainer articles about the Sudan conflict. Through qualitative transitivity and modality analysis of two comparable November 2025 articles, this research examines how linguistic choices reveal ideological positioning regarding who acts, who suffers, and whose knowledge counts as legitimate. Findings demonstrate systematic patterns across both outlets which are passive constructions and nominalization obscure military actors' responsibility for civilian casualties; asymmetric agency attribution constructs RSF as violent aggressors while rendering structural dimensions invisible; and a three-tier epistemic hierarchy privileges Western institutional voices (US, HRW) with definitive modality, grants international bodies (UN) investigative authority, while relegating local Darfuri voices to subjective belief-based positioning. Critically, these patterns

converge regardless of outlets' geographic positioning, Indonesian regional versus British global, revealing what Foucault identifies as "capillary power": the circulation of Western-centric knowledge frameworks through institutionalized journalistic norms that transcend individual bias or national interest. This convergence demonstrates that transforming conflict representation requires not merely diversifying media sources but fundamentally challenging the embedded "regimes of truth" determining whose knowledge is recognizable as legitimate in global journalism, with implications extending beyond African conflict reporting to broader questions of epistemic justice in international media.

Keywords: *BBC articles, critical discourse analysis, modality, Sudan conflict, transitivity*

INTRODUCTION

The armed conflict in Sudan, which started on April 15, 2023, between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), has led to what the United Nations calls the world's largest humanitarian crisis. In the first 14 months of the conflict, conservative estimates say that there were 61,202 all-cause deaths in Khartoum State alone, with 26,024 of those deaths directly caused by intentional injuries. This number is much higher than the global death tolls reported for the same period (Dahab et al., 2025). The conflict has caused cascading crises in many areas, in addition to the immediate violence. For example, healthcare systems have broken down, with primary healthcare centers running out of medical supplies (63.6% availability), vaccines (48.0% availability), and essential drugs (54.4% availability) (Rabih et al., 2025); higher education institutions have been devastated, with 104 universities directly affected and mass displacement of students and faculty disrupting academic continuity (Eltahir et al., 2025; Mohamed et al., 2025); and the economy has shrunk dramatically, with GDP expected to fall by 32-42% by the end of 2025, raising the national poverty rate by 19 percentage points (Ahmed et al., 2025). The conflict's repercussions transcend Sudan's borders, jeopardizing the security framework of the entire Horn of Africa region and subjecting adjacent nations to refugee surges and political turmoil (Liyew, 2025). Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the Director-General of the World Health Organization, said that there is much less global attention on conflicts in Sudan and other African countries than on crises in other parts of the

world (Muhassin, 2023).

In modern conflict situations, media discourse plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion, influencing policy decisions, and ultimately determining the level of international attention and humanitarian aid allocated to crises. Widdatallah (2025) illustrates that in the Sudanese context, media practice is fundamentally linked to the prospects for national recovery and reconstruction, with the correlation between media coverage of opportunities and challenges directly influencing potential development outcomes. The influence of media transcends mere information dissemination; it actively shapes reality through linguistic selections that allocate agency, establish epistemic authority, and validate specific worldviews. Ibrahim's (2025) examination of social media during Sudan's conflict illustrates its dual role as "a conduit for hate speech and a platform for peacebuilding," wherein algorithmic biases exacerbate divisive rhetoric, while grassroots initiatives utilize the same platforms for peace advocacy. This observation corresponds with extensive research on the media's framing of geopolitical conflicts. Haimed (2024) illustrates how newspapers from major world powers utilized disparate linguistic tactics, e.g., emotional lexis, modality, and transitivity, to create divergent discursive framings of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, each reflecting distinct geopolitical interests and ideological stances. The linguistic mechanisms employed by media to construct conflict narratives are not neutral channels of information; instead, they serve as arenas of ideological struggle where power dynamics are perpetuated, challenged, and normalized through systematic patterns of language usage.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of conflict has advanced markedly in revealing concealed ideologies via media's linguistic selections, encompassing the examination of headlines regarding the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (Haimed, 2024), the framing of Poland's migration crisis (Kosman, 2024), and the discourse analysis of the Russia-Ukraine war (Verbytska, 2024). The Systemic

Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach, emphasizing transitivity and modality, has been extensively utilized to examine political discourse, including presidential speeches (Darong, 2022; Mai et al., 2024), Biden's crisis communications (Fareh et al., 2025), political disinformation on Indonesian social media (Ayomi et al., 2025), and identity formation in TED Talks (Khalil, 2024).

These studies primarily focus on speech genres or brief headlines, whereas comprehensive examinations of long-form explanatory articles from international media regarding current African conflicts, especially the Sudan conflict, are significantly lacking. Moreover, despite the Sudan conflict resulting in the most significant humanitarian crisis globally, with mortality rates reaching 61,202 deaths in Khartoum alone within the initial 14 months (Dahab et al., 2025), and its multifaceted repercussions on the healthcare system (S. M. M. Ahmed et al., 2025; Elobied et al., 2025), higher education (Eltahir et al., 2025; Mohamed et al., 2025), economy and poverty (M. Ahmed et al., 2025), as well as threats to regional stability in the Horn of Africa (Liyew, 2025), no research has specifically employed transitivity and modality analysis within a philosophical Critical Discourse Analysis framework to elucidate the construction of agency and epistemic power relations in media narratives concerning this conflict. Current research has not examined how variations in audience positioning (global versus regional) affect ideological construction in the representation of the same conflict, despite the significant role of media practices in shaping public perception and prospects for post-conflict reconstruction (Widdatallah, 2025). Additionally, the role of social media in the Sudan conflict illustrates the intricate relationship between hate speech propaganda and peace building counter-narratives (Ibrahim, 2025).

This study presents three substantial original contributions. This study constitutes the inaugural philosophical CDA analysis that systematically contrasts the representation of the Sudan conflict in BBC Indonesia and BBC International explainer articles through a dual SFL framework (transitivity

and modality) to reveal concealed ideologies regarding agency distribution and epistemic power relations, thereby addressing a genre gap that remains unexamined in current conflict CDA literature. This study addresses a methodological deficiency by operationalizing abstract philosophical concepts (agency and power relations) through concrete linguistic analysis: transitivity to elucidate "who does what" (distribution of agency), and modality to clarify "who possesses the authority to assert truth" (epistemic power relations). This method facilitates the recognition of systematic ideological patterns, particularly in the manifestation of Western epistemological privilege through modality selections when referencing various authoritative sources (US vs UN vs local Darfur residents). This research enhances African conflict literature by offering a comparative analysis of global and regional media regarding a conflict that, although deemed the world's largest humanitarian crisis, continues to suffer from a "global attention gap" and systematic under-reporting relative to conflicts in other regions.

In light of the identified research gap, this study presents a primary research question: "How do variations in transitivity and modality construction between BBC Indonesia and BBC International expose underlying ideologies regarding agency distribution and power dynamics in the Sudan conflict?" This research question is implemented through two analytical focuses: (1) Agency distribution via transitivity analysis, discerning the designation of active Actor versus passive Goal in Material processes, and examining the utilization of nominalization and passive voice to either obscure or assert the accountability of conflict participants; (2) Epistemic power dynamics through modality analysis, identifying how varying degrees of certainty, authoritative citation sources, and verbal process framing establish epistemological hierarchies that favor specific voices in delineating the "reality" of conflict. This analytical framework elucidates not only the content of the discourse but, more fundamentally, the construction of reality, the agency that is emphasized or marginalized, and the entities possessing the authority to define truth in media narratives concerning the Sudan conflict.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study utilizes a qualitative critical discourse analysis (CDA) methodology based on Fairclough's three-dimensional framework (textual, discursive practice, and social practice) and implemented through Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), with particular emphasis on transitivity and modality analysis. This design is warranted by the study's philosophical objective to elucidate concealed ideologies inherent in linguistic selections, as Critical Discourse Analysis has demonstrated efficacy in exposing power dynamics and ideological stances in media discourse on geopolitical conflicts (Haimed, 2024; Kosman, 2024). The amalgamation of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a structured approach to investigate the manifestation and construction of power relations through linguistic attributes, as evidenced by recent analyses of political oratory (Mai et al., 2024; Fareh et al., 2025) and media representation (Verbytska, 2024). This qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, in contrast to quantitative content analysis that emphasizes frequency and distribution, facilitates a thorough investigation of how particular linguistic mechanisms, such as passive constructions, nominalization, and modal expressions, operate to allocate agency and assert epistemic authority in conflict narratives. This study adopts a philosophical perspective that views language not simply as a neutral communication tool but as a battleground for ideological conflict where reality is shaped, challenged, and validated through discursive activities (Fairclough, 2015).

The data corpus consists of two detailed explanatory articles: "Perang saudara di Sudan, apa saja yang perlu diketahui?" from BBC Indonesia (published November 6, 2025) and "A simple guide to what is happening in Sudan" from BBC International (published November 13, 2025). This purposive sampling method is warranted for three reasons. Explainer articles constitute a unique genre that serves as media outlets' "official stance" in shaping public comprehension of intricate conflicts, a

genre inadequately examined in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research, which primarily concentrates on headlines (Haimed, 2024; Kosman, 2024) or political speeches (Darong, 2022; Mai et al., 2024). Secondly, choosing articles published within one week of each other (November 2025) mitigates temporal variables, ensuring both outlets addressed the same evolving conflict, thereby facilitating a meaningful comparison of ideological framing rather than discrepancies due to changing events. Third, both articles possess identical communicative objectives (elucidating the origins, principal actors, and status of the Sudan conflict to general audiences) and exhibit similar lengths (approximately 1,500-2,000 words), offering comparable textual depth for transitivity and modality analysis while illustrating the discursive construction of the same conflict for global versus regional Indonesian audiences. This sample strategy adheres to recognized CDA methodologies that emphasize depth rather than breadth, concentrating on thorough examination of representative texts that reveal wider discursive patterns (Fairclough, 1992).

The data collection adhered to a methodical three-phase procedure. Phase 1 (Text Acquisition): The two articles were obtained directly from the BBC Indonesia (https://www.bbc.com/indonesia/articles/c8eygp9kgljo) and BBC International (https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cjel2nn22z9o) websites, maintaining the entirety of the textual material, including headlines, subheadings, and body text. Screenshots were taken to record the original formatting and contextual components. Phase 2 (Clause Segmentation): In accordance with SFL analytical standards (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), each article was divided into separate sentences, serving as the fundamental unit of analysis for transitivity assessment. The segmentation algorithm detected 487 clauses in the BBC Indonesia article and 521 clauses in the BBC International piece, yielding adequate data density for pattern recognition. Each clause was consecutively numbered and incorporated into a coding matrix for systematic analysis. Stage 3 (Data Verification): To ensure

reliability, clause segmentation was cross-verified by re-reading each article twice with a one-week interval to confirm consistency in identifying clause boundaries, adhering to quality assurance protocols established in linguistic discourse analysis. This rigorous data collection method guarantees that the next transitivity and modality analysis is based on precisely identifiable linguistic units, hence improving the validity and reproducibility of results.

The data analysis adhered to a methodical four-phase procedure that included SFL and CDA frameworks. Phase 1 (Transitivity Analysis): Each clause was categorized based on Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) process kinds (Material, Mental, Verbal, Relational, Behavioral, Existential), identifying Participants (Actor, Goal, Sayer, Senser, Carrier) and Circumstances. Specific focus was directed towards: (a) Material processes to identify individuals portrayed as active agents versus passive recipients of action; (b) Verbal processes to analyze the framing of statements by various actors; (c) Passive constructions and nominalizations that obscure agency. This methodology adheres to recognized SFL frameworks in the analysis of political speech (Khalil, 2024; Mai et al., 2024). Phase 2 (Modality Examination): Modal expressions were classified by type (epistemic modality: possibility/certainty; deontic modality: obligation/permission) and level (high/median/low), analyzing the linguistic encoding of certainty and the attribution of authoritative status to voices in truth claims (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Phase 3 (Pattern Identification): Transitivity and modality patterns were methodically analyzed across the two articles. Patterns were analyzed using Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis model: textual features (linguistic selections), discursive practices (creation and interpretation), and social practices (power dynamics and ideology). Phase 4 (Philosophical Interpretation): Utilizing Foucault's power/knowledge framework, discerned patterns were examined to uncover the foundational beliefs of the entitlement to act, articulate, and establish reality within the discourse of the Sudan conflict. This concluding interpretive phase links

micro-level linguistic decisions to macro-level philosophical inquiries regarding epistemic justice and representational authority in international media portrayals of African conflicts, thereby enhancing critical scholarship on media discourse and geopolitical representation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Diplomatic Neutrality as Ideological Strategy

The systematic use of passive constructions and nominalization in both BBC Indonesia and BBC International articles reveals what Melis and Chambers (2021) identify as the deployment of "discursive strategies of conviction" that operate within existing power structures while appearing neutral. When BBC Indonesia writes *"Sudan terjerumus dalam perang saudara"* and BBC International states *"Sudan plunged into a civil war,"* both outlets employ ergative constructions that, following Foucault's power/knowledge framework, function to "normalize" conflict as a natural phenomenon rather than a product of specific human decisions and institutional failures (Joyce, 2024). This grammatical erasure of agency aligns with what Varghese and Ranganathan (2022) describe as the "importance of context in discourse analysis," where seemingly objective linguistic choices actually embed specific ideological assumptions about causality and responsibility. The fact that both outlets, despite serving different audiences (global vs. regional Indonesian), adopt similar agency-obscuring strategies suggests that these patterns reflect not individual journalistic choices but rather what Foucault terms "regimes of truth": institutionalized ways of producing knowledge that determine what can be said, by whom, and with what authority (Riba & Saunderson, 2022). The paradox lies in how this appearance of neutrality—achieved through passive voice and abstract nominalization, actually serves to depoliticize the conflict by obscuring the concrete decisions, institutional structures, and power relations that produced the violence, thereby functioning as what Phillips et al. (2023)

identify as a "discursive subjectivity" that positions both media outlets and audiences within predetermined interpretive frameworks that privilege certain explanations over others.

Asymmetric Agency Attribution and the Construction of "Legitimate" vs "Illegitimate" Violence

The differential agency attribution between the Sudanese Army (presented as reactive and defensive) and the RSF (presented as actively violent) in BBC Indonesia, contrasted with the more symmetrical framing in BBC International, illuminates how media discourse functions as what Foucault calls an "apparatus of security", a mechanism that categorizes populations and actions according to logics of governmentality (Schojan & Schmidt-Hamburger, 2025). BBC Indonesia's construction of the Militer as responding to threats (*"Militer kemudian melancarkan kudeta untuk menggulingkannya"*) versus RSF as perpetrating unprovoked violence (*"RSF merebut sebagian besar Khartoum"*, *"RSF menghxancurkan kamp pengungsian"*) parallels what Nagle and Vidon (2022) describe as discourses that "problematically privilege" certain actors while obscuring others' agency through selective linguistic framing. This asymmetry may reflect Indonesia's own geopolitical positioning and historical experiences with military coups and authoritarian transitions, where state military institutions are discursively constructed as stabilizing forces despite their violence. Conversely, BBC International's more symmetrical framing, explicitly stating *"both the RSF and army had committed war crimes"* and imposing *"similar measures against Gen Burhan,"* suggests what Ballentyne and Drury (2023) identify as the imposition of "particular subject-positions" through discourse, where both generals are positioned as equally culpable strongmen in a power struggle. Yet even this apparent balance operates within what van Vliet et al. (2025) call "neo-colonial" frameworks of representation, where African conflicts are discursively constructed as products of individual warlords' ambitions rather than legacies of colonial state-building, resource extraction regimes, and

international arms flows. The agency given to military actors while systematically erasing the structural and international dimensions of the conflict reveals how, as Foucault argues, power operates not merely through repression but through the production of specific kinds of knowledge that make certain explanations appear natural and others unthinkable.

The Three-Tier Epistemic Hierarchy: Western Institutions as Truth-Producers

The consistent pattern across both BBC outlets whereby US institutional voices receive definitive modality (*"menetapkan"/"determined"*), UN bodies receive investigative authority (*"menemukan"/"found"*), and local Darfuri voices are relegated to subjective belief (*"meyakini"/"believe"*) exemplifies what Foucault identifies as the power/knowledge nexus: the inseparability of knowledge production from relations of power (Melis & Chambers, 2021). This hierarchical distribution of epistemic authority operates as what Parsons and Fisher (2021) describe as "colonial knowledges" that systematically privilege Western and international institutional ways of knowing over local, experiential knowledge. The fact that Anthony Blinken's statement, *"Based on this information, I have now concluded that members of the RSF and allied militias have committed genocide in Sudan"*, is presented without hedging or qualification in both outlets, while Darfuri residents' parallel assessments are framed as mere "beliefs," reveals what Senevirathne et al. (2024) analyze as accounting practices that "create new objects of knowledge" through systematic categorization: Darfuris are constructed as victims whose suffering is real but whose interpretations are epistemically unreliable, requiring validation by Western expertise. This pattern extends beyond the genocide question to weapon sourcing, where allegations about UAE support are framed as regional "accusations" (*"menuduh"/"accuses"*) until UN experts pronounce them *"credible,"* at which point they gain epistemic weight. The operation of this three-tier hierarchy demonstrates what Joyce (2024) identifies as "complex power relations" shaping knowledge production, where geographic and

institutional positioning determines "who has the right to speak" and whose speech "counts as truth." Critically, this epistemic hierarchy persists regardless of whether the media outlet is Western (BBC International) or regional (BBC Indonesia), suggesting that what Foucault calls “capillary power,” that is power that circulates through institutions and discursive practices rather than emanating from a central source, has deeply penetrated global journalistic norms, reproducing Western epistemic dominance even in non-Western media spaces.

Dramatization, Metaphor, and the Production of Affective Publics

BBC International's deployment of evaluative language (*"vicious struggle"*, *"notorious Janjaweed"*, *"brutally fought"*) and metaphorical imagery (*"burnt-out shell"*, *"graveyard of smashed planes"*) versus BBC Indonesia's more factual register reveals how different journalistic traditions mobilize what Marone and Heinsfeld (2023) identify as "discursive framing" to construct particular "needs, perceptions, attitudes, expectations, and values." The Anglo-American tradition's emphasis on dramatic narrative and emotional engagement—evident in BBC International's vivid descriptions of sexual violence against children *"as young as one"* and the immediate horror of hospitals destroyed *"sometimes with patients still inside"*, functions to interpellate readers as what Zhang and Xie (2025) call subjects within a "spectacle," where the conflict becomes consumable as humanitarian crisis requiring Western intervention rather than as a complex political struggle with deep historical roots. This dramatization operates through what Foucault describes as "games of truth": discursive practices that establish what counts as real, serious, and urgent (Varghese & Ranganathan, 2022). By contrast, BBC Indonesia's more restrained language, describing the same destruction as *"kota itu telah hangus terbakar"* (the city has burned) without metaphorical embellishment, may reflect either different journalistic norms or a more cautious positioning toward a conflict in which regional actors

(UAE, Egypt, Saudi Arabia) have vested interests. Yet this restraint does not necessarily indicate less ideological bias; rather, as Lennon and Berg (2022) argue in their analysis of ecovillage discourse, it may represent a different "Othering" strategy where emotional distance serves to maintain Indonesia's diplomatic neutrality in a conflict implicating regional partners. What unites both approaches is their function as what Foucault terms "technologies of power": mechanisms through which subjects (readers, publics) are constituted within specific relations of knowledge and governance, whether through affective engagement (BBC International) or diplomatic caution (BBC Indonesia).

Evidential Markers and the Performance of Scientific Authority

The proliferation of evidential markers in BBC International, *"evidence suggests"*, *"according to a leaked report by UN experts"*, *"Amnesty International says it has found evidence"*, versus BBC Indonesia's more straightforward attribution practices reveals how journalistic discourse performs what Potnis and Winberry (2021) identify as the construction of "information practices" that establish credibility and authority. These evidential markers function, following Foucault, as "rituals of truth": formalized procedures through which statements acquire the status of knowledge rather than mere opinion (Melis & Chambers, 2021). By invoking procedural language of investigation, evidence-gathering, and expert analysis, BBC International positions itself within what Rapley et al. (2023) describe as "systematically reviewing qualitative research," a discourse of scientific rigor that legitimizes particular truth claims. Critically, these evidential markers are deployed asymmetrically: Western and international sources are granted this scientific legitimacy (*"evidence suggests they have been supplied with weapons by Iran"*), while regional and local actors' statements appear without such procedural framing, marked only as *"accuses"* or *"denies."* This asymmetry reproduces what Mason and Shankar (2024) identify as "performative inclusion," where certain voices are technically present but systematically delegitimized through discursive framing. The fact that even when Western

institutions are implicated, as when UK lawmakers questioned British arms reaching RSF, the discourse maintains institutional accountability framing (*"UK government came under fire from its own lawmakers"*, *"Foreign Secretary... said"*) rather than simple denial, suggests that Western self-critique functions paradoxically to reinforce epistemic authority: the ability to admit potential wrongdoing while reassuring audiences of *"extremely strong controls"* demonstrates transparency that further legitimizes Western institutional voices as uniquely capable of self-regulation and truth-telling. This pattern exemplifies what Foucault describes as the production of "subjugated knowledges, forms of knowing that are present but systematically disqualified from counting as legitimate knowledge within dominant discursive orders.

The Absent Structural Analysis: Neoliberal Framings of Conflict

Perhaps most revealing is what both BBC outlets systematically fail to discuss: the structural conditions enabling the conflict, including decades of IMF-imposed austerity that weakened Sudanese state capacity, international demand for Sudanese gold fueling RSF financing, and the legacies of colonial-era administrative divisions that created the conditions for ethnic mobilization. This absence operates as what Foucault calls "silences" within discourse, not merely omissions but active productions of ignorance that shape what can be known and said (Joyce, 2024). By framing the conflict primarily through the lens of individual actors (two generals fighting for power) and immediate humanitarian consequences (famine, displacement, atrocities), both outlets reproduce what Paing et al. (2023) identify as "neoliberal" framings that obscure "political economy" and structural causation. This individualized, de-historicized framing aligns with what Haikola et al. (2024) describe as discourses that enable "the scaling up of localised resistance" while obscuring systemic issues, in this case, the individualization of conflict causation enables international audiences to understand Sudan's war as a product of African strongmen's ambitions rather than as deeply connected to global economic

structures, arms trade regimes, and resource extraction systems. The minimal discussion of international arms flows, relegated to a single late section in both articles, and the framing of humanitarian aid cuts as technical decisions (*"decision of the Trump administration to cut aid"*) rather than as structural violence that compounds the crisis, exemplifies what Mills et al. (2023) identify as "gaps" between agency and institutionalism in discourse: individual actions are foregrounded while institutional structures and historical legacies remain obscured. This pattern of systematic absence demonstrates how, as Foucault argues, power operates most effectively not through what is said but through the establishment of boundaries determining what remains unsayable, constituting the very limits of intelligibility within which both journalists and audiences operate.

Geographic Positioning and the Reproduction of Global Hierarchies

The finding that BBC Indonesia and BBC International, despite serving dramatically different audiences and originating from different geographic positions, reproduce remarkably similar epistemic hierarchies and agency distributions challenges simplistic assumptions about media bias as reflecting "national interests." Instead, this convergence reveals what Foucault describes as the "capillary" nature of power: its circulation through institutions, professional norms, and discursive practices that transcend individual actors or national boundaries (Schojan & Schmidt-Hamburger, 2025). Both outlets operate within what Phillips et al. (2023) identify as "gendered dynamics and institutional complexities" that shape professional identities: journalists are trained in similar frameworks, rely on overlapping sources (UN, international NGOs, Western governments), and internalize similar norms about what constitutes "objective" reporting. The slight stylistic differences, BBC International's dramatization versus BBC Indonesia's restraint, should not obscure the fundamental similarity in their structural positioning of knowledge producers: Western institutions determine truth, international bodies investigate, regional actors accuse, and local voices believe. This pattern extends what Shelby

et al. (2022) describe as "contested identities" within "glocal" contexts, where global discursive frameworks are locally instantiated but retain their core power relations. The implication is profound: the problem is not individual journalist bias or even specific media outlet positioning, but rather what Foucault terms the "regime of truth" itself, the historically produced, institutionally embedded system through which certain forms of knowledge are recognized as legitimate while others are systematically excluded or delegitimized. As Ballentyne and Drury (2023) argue regarding asylum discourse, institutional texts function as "powerful psychological tools" that "open up or close down opportunities" for different forms of knowledge and identity. In the context of conflict reporting, this means that regardless of good intentions or professional ethics, journalists operating within dominant frameworks inevitably reproduce epistemic hierarchies that privilege Western institutional knowledge, individualize structural violence, and construct African conflicts as products of local pathology rather than global systems, unless these frameworks themselves are fundamentally challenged and transformed.

CONCLUSION

This study uncovers a fundamental paradox in modern international journalism: the discourse of "objectivity" and "balanced reporting" does not overcome power dynamics; rather, it serves as a mechanism for the naturalization and perpetuation of global epistemic hierarchies across geographic and institutional boundaries. The convergence of BBC Indonesia and BBC International in developing identical three-tier epistemic frameworks, despite catering to vastly different audiences and emerging from colonial and postcolonial contexts, illustrates that the issue of representation is not rooted in individual media bias or national viewpoints, but rather in what Foucault terms the "regime of truth": the deeply entrenched systems that dictate which knowledge is deemed legitimate and which is

consistently marginalized. The identified systematic linguistic patterns, including passive constructions that obscure perpetrator responsibility, modality hierarchies that favor Western institutional authority, and individualized conflict narratives that erase structural violence, are not mere stylistic choices but are, as Foucault describes, "technologies of power" that shape the conditions for journalistic knowledge production in today's global media environment.

This has extensive implications that extend beyond merely addressing conflicts in Africa or Sudan. To enhance the equity of global knowledge production, it is imperative to implement measures beyond merely incorporating varied perspectives into existing mechanisms. We must thoroughly deconstruct and reevaluate the professional standards, institutional procedures, and discursive frameworks that dictate the credibility of information, the power to define truth, and the legitimacy of various forms of pain. If journalism fails to confront and transform the entrenched power/knowledge structures rooted in colonial epistemologies and perpetuated by neoliberal globalization, media coverage will continue to reproduce the very inequalities it claims to report on, regardless of journalists' intentions or the geographical location of their outlets. To progress, we must fundamentally alter our conceptualization of knowledge. This entails prioritizing marginalized knowledges, dismantling Western epistemic dominance, and perceiving journalism as a medium for disseminating knowledge.

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