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Scotland, Wales and press discourses amid the 2016 EU Referendum

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Introduction

This chapter analyses press coverage of the 23 June 2016 EU referendum in the Scottish and Welsh contexts. A range of newspapers from these two devolved nations in Great Britain are sampled, from the three months prior to the referendum. In the United Kingdom (UK), the Scotland vote demonstrated the highest support for remaining in the European Union (EU). The Wales result matched almost identically the overall UK vote in favour of leaving the EU. In contrast to Wales, the EU referendum in Scotland was amid the precursory context of the independence referendum of 2014 and the possibility of a second independence referendum in the event of a UK wide vote in favour of Britain exiting the European Union, also known as 'Brexit'.

Taking a discourse analysis approach, the chapter analyses key lexical themes in the Scottish press and Welsh press. Looking at how key tropes of public discourse are developed in the press, particularly through accusations of 'Project Fear', the chapter explores discourses of danger and imperilment that predominate in the newspaper coverage. The chapter suggests that this campaign exemplifies the association between 'fear' as a discursive weapon in contemporary politics (Wodak, 2015) and constitutional change. However, we also suggest that these discourses are used knowingly and tactically for a variety of political ends.

Scotland, Wales and the 2016 EU Referendum

The place of Scotland in discussion of the EU Referendum was assured as soon as the results became apparent. A UK-wide vote of 52 per cent to Leave against 48 per cent to Remain contrasted with a Scottish vote of 62 per cent in favour of Remain against 38 per cent to Leave (BBC, 2016). As Higgins (2017) argues, the 2016 referendum on Scottish independence occasioned sustained public and political discourse around the possible alienation of the Scottish electorate. Even though a comparatively close and uneven result seems likely to revitalise talk of second referendum on Scottish independence, known as 'indyref2', the difference in outcome hints at a quite different campaign in Scotland from that in other parts of the UK.

The situation in Wales provides a number of contrasts with that of Scotland. In Wales, with a result of 52.5 per cent Leave and 47.5 per cent Remain, the vote closely mirrored that of England's 53.5 per cent Leave and 46.5 per cent Remain

(BBC, 2016). Since the rebirth of the Scottish Parliament in 2003, there has been a surge in support for the independence-supporting Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland, whereas the inauguration of the Senedd (National Assembly for Wales) in 2006 has failed to bring similar political gains for their Welsh counterpart Plaid Cymru (The Party of Wales).

Jeffery and Hough (2009) offer one potential explanation for this disparity by suggesting that differences in 'state-wide' elections can occur when there are differences in the balances of power at 'sub-state' levels, as we see in the cases of Scotland and Wales in the devolved UK context. Even so, historic rhetoric depicting shared mutual affections, by some political leaders, has laid claim to a Celtic pact between these two devolved nations of the UK. However, the Brexit vote in Wales seems to contradict the two commonly-held assumptions that the Welsh are pro-EU and that they occupy a similar political point on the political spectrum to the Scots, and suggests there may be more substantial differences between the Scottish and Welsh contexts.

The Analysis

The analysis will focus on Scottish and Welsh middle-market to quality press, representing a sample from the two devolved nations in Great Britain. There are a number of Scottish papers nationally-distributed in Scotland and it is possible to reflect the opposing sides of the campaign on the UK's place within the EU. In keeping with the greater number of Scottish papers, and in order to represent newspapers against and in favour of exiting the EU, the Scottish papers examined

are the *Scottish Daily Express* and *Scottish Daily Mail* in favour of leaving the EU; and the quality broadsheet *The Herald* and middle-market tabloid the *Daily Record* in support of Remain. Scottish coverage of the referendum followed similar contours to that of the previous independence referendum in making the most of the uncertainty inherent in a significant change in the arrangements of state: previously, in respect of the potential break-up of the UK and now in the UK's proposed departure from the European Union.

In contrast, the *Western Mail/Wales on Sunday* is the only Welsh national paper and it supported the Remain campaign. Two other newspapers in Wales with some national prominence in the run-up to the referendum were the North Wales regional paper the *Daily Post*; and the South Wales regional the *Evening Post*. (The *Evening Post*'s online presence merged with *WalesOnline* (part of the *Western Mail*) in March 2017 (WalesOnline, 2017). Both Welsh regional papers claimed to have taken a neutral position on the 2016 EU Referendum, however, a senior representative for the *Evening Post* acknowledges that the paper was criticised for 'leaning toward the Remain vote'. The Welsh component of the analysis, therefore, features the *Western Mail/Wales on Sunday*, the *Daily Post* and the *Evening Post*.

Across both case samples, the analysis focuses on the various lexical options used to define the terms of the debate. In this regard, we will follow the principles of critical discourse analysis in seeing the choices and arrangements of language as concerned in the expression and the maintenance of relations of power (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Particularly, we are interested in how sustained

lexical frames produced help shape media's contribution to the public sphere (Higgins, 2017). Critical discourse analysis maintains a significant degree of flexibility in order to keep pace with the dynamism associated with the political use of language. This adaptability in CDA is also necessary to understand the variety of contexts in which political discourse of the referendum unfolds, and the various contexts of interpretation these invite.

Discourses of danger

One of the frames of discussion in the run-up to the referendum concerned the 'dangers' that an exit from the EU posed. Discursive frames associated with crisis and imperilments have a long-standing association with significant political change (Hay, 1999), and occupied a prominent place in public discourse around this referendum (Higgins, 2016). Indeed, this sustained after the result with President Obama engaging in such a frame to warn of a 'dangerous' nationalism in a post-EU setting (quoted in Squires, 2016). A search on Lexis Nexis for appearances of 'referendum' and 'danger' during the three months up to the referendum yields a total of 190 articles in the Scottish newspapers and 36 articles in the Welsh newspapers, albeit that there is one more Scottish paper in the sample than Welsh. While not all instances in which the terms appeared in the same article offer a straightforward relationship between danger and the referendum outcome, the following Scottish *Herald* opinion article from which the following is extracted engages with this link in a vivid manner:

Extract: The Herald, 18 June 2016 (Scotland)

1	[...]
2	WHATEVER the outcome of the referendum, politicians will have had
3	confirmed their obvious belief that they can obfuscate without fear of
4	retribution. Our democracy is in great danger, not only as a result of the
5	totally unacceptable behaviour of our elected representatives but also as a
6	consequence of the longstanding disengagement of the public from the
7	democratic processes, an eager acceptance of easy solutions and an
8	alarming willingness to indulge in scapegoating.
9	Nevertheless, the answer lies in the hands of the community of citizens, or at
10	least sufficient numbers thereof, assisted perhaps by those politicians who
11	recognise the danger our society is in. I would go so far as to suggest that
12	the public's reaction to the tactics adopted by both campaigns could be as
13	important as the outcome of the referendum. Disempowering cynicism and
14	despair, while welcomed by those who hold the reins of power, would be an
15	absolute disaster.
	[...]

A lexicon of menace dominates this extract, anchored with such items such as 'retribution' and 'great danger'. Within this overarching discourse, the irresponsibility of politicians, anchored in their designation as 'elected representatives' (line 5), is amplified as 'totally unacceptable', and pursued in a sequence of negative constructions: 'easy solutions' (line 7), 'alarming willingness' (line 8) and 'absolute disaster' (line 15). Importantly, 'danger' itself is not offered as part of an assertion or political claim on the part of the writer, but instead provides the grounds for an

account of the politicians' own understanding (as 'those [...] who recognise the danger our society is in', (lines 10-11).

However the next extract, from the opposing *Scottish Daily Mail*, presents the notion of danger as an article of dispute. Indeed, the use of the word itself is outsourced to senior Bank of England official Mark Carney:

Extract: *Scottish Daily Mail*, 17 June 2016 (Scotland)

1	GIVEN his past as a banker with Goldman Sachs - arguably one of the
2	world's most amoral financial institutions - Mark Carney's conduct during the
3	referendum campaign will come as no surprise.
4	Both the Governor of the Bank of England and Goldman - a bank which was
5	inextricably linked to the greed and hubris that sparked the 2008 economic
6	crash - have issued dire warnings about what fate awaits Britain post-Brexit.
7	But while the bank, which has considerable financial links to the EU, has
8	made its own position clear with a £500,000 donation to Remain, Mr Carney
9	implausibly insists that he is neutral.
10	The Mail disagrees with him. We find it difficult to reconcile his lurid public
11	statements about the dangers of leaving with his claim yesterday that he has
12	limited himself to fulfilling the Bank's 'statutory responsibilities'.

A parallel rhetoric of amplification is in evidence here, but rather and lending negative weight to any danger in leaving the EU this intensifies the negative portrayal of Carney and the Bank of England ('inextricably linked' line 5;

'considerable financial links', line 7). This lends an ironic tone to the modification of their warnings as 'dire' (line 6); and building on this mood of contempt, Carney's 'public statements about the dangers' are pre-defined as 'lurid' and juxtaposed with the formal register of the 'statutory responsibilities' of the Bank (line 12), rendered using the disassociating tactics of scare quotes. A similar use of 'danger' to characterize and then dismiss officially-sanctioned warnings can be found in the framing of an expert voice is an *Scottish Daily Mail* report of three days before on 14 June 2016 'David Blake, professor of pension economics at Cass, which is based at City University London, accused the Treasury of churning out 'grossly exaggerated' warnings on the dangers of Brexit' (*Scottish Daily Mail*, June 14 2016).

In the Wales case, the following *Western Mail* news article continues the theme of economic danger through highlighting an attack on the Leave campaign's 'dangerous fantasies' (line 1) by a group of leading economists in support of Remain:

Extract: *Western Mail*, 23 June 2016 (Wales)

1	LEAVE campaigners are misleading voters and using 'dangerous fantasies'
2	to support their economic case, according to several Nobel prize-winning
3	economists.
4	The group of 12, including 2015 victor Sir Angus Deaton, were joined by
5	more than 150 other economists to reiterate their support for Remain in the
6	final hours of the referendum campaign.
7	Their intervention came after Michael Gove compared economic experts
8	warning about the fall-out of Brexit to the Nazis smearing Albert Einstein in
9	the 1930s. The Economists for Remain statement said a recession is
10	'significantly more likely' due to the 'shock and uncertainty' should Brexit
11	occur, adding the cost of goods would increase due to a drop in the pound
12	and increased tariffs on imports.
13	[...]

A tone of trepidation and the ferocity of debate are further demonstrated in the rhetoric of the Leave campaign through reference to Nazi history (lines 7-9). This is immediately countered with an emphasis on economic 'shock and uncertainty' (line 10) and impacts on the pound (lines 11-12) in the event of Brexit.

Like the Scottish extracts, a discourse of peril pervades both sides and is used as a rhetorical tool in order to amplify the tone of the debate. Linking these fears with an economic context serves to intensify this further. Dekavalla (2016) argues that the press frame referendums, like the one on Scottish independence, as they would general election campaigns and, therefore, focus on pragmatic outcomes like impacts on the economy. Although nationalism in Wales has not has not seen the

same intensity of support as Scotland demonstrated in the 2014 independence referendum, there is initial evidence for a similar crisis frame (Higgins, 2017) in Welsh press coverage of the EU referendum.

The re-appropriation of Project Fear

Another prominent item of political coinage related to the perceived tone of the campaign is 'Project Fear'. In a manner related to the discourses of danger outlined above, this appeared as a disobliging sobriquet applied by supporters of the 2014 campaign for Scottish independence in order to condemn the tactics of those supporting Scotland's place in the United Kingdom. The basis of the project is that those in government, and keen to support the constitutional status quo, are well-positioned to produce scare stories around the implications of change, with the apparatus of government and much of the media at their disposal.

Chaput (2010: 10) calls attention to the discursive power of 'fear', likening its use value to that of a 'commodity', able to lend an 'affective value or energy' to a 'given rhetorical situation'. The motif Project Fear was revitalized and used to frame many of the warnings of opponents of Brexit. In his debate clash with Sturgeon, Boris Johnson deployed this now-established trope as a means of diminishing the veracity of the Remain position. Ironically ventriloquizing Sturgeon's description of the anti-independence campaign from 2014 as 'miserable, negative and fear-based - and fear-based campaigning of this kind starts to insult people's intelligence' (quoted in Phipps, 2016), Johnson thereby deploys dominant discourses from the previous

Scottish referendum, bearing the implication that Sturgeon had previously opposed and now engaged in such tactics.

A search for the phrase ‘project fear’ through Lexis Nexis in the three months prior to the EU referendum reveals 233 examples of its use across UK newspapers. While at first glance it appears that ‘project fear’ presents to what Pecheux (1988) describes as a ‘preconstructed’ item for the political lexicon – a rapidly-established and loaded rhetorical weapon, based upon a longer-standing normative concern about the mood of political discourse – in Scotland in particular there is evidence of contestation and adaptability in its use. These extracts from popular tabloid the *Daily Record* and quality newspaper the *Herald*, a month apart, draw attention to the shift of Project Fear from its context of one referendum to its place in the next:

Extract: Crichton, *Daily Record*, 3 June 2016 (Scotland)

1	The big ‘i’ word (not independence). The flip side of economic uncertainty is
2	the Brexiteers' own Project Fear on immigration and the effect it will have on
3	the UK. People fear immigration and think their communities are changing
4	with no one asking them.

The re-appropriation of the description ‘Project Fear’ (line 2) is emphasised in the *Daily Record* extract by its designation as ‘the Brexiteers’ own’ (line 2). To the initiated reader, a reference is offered to the former version of the Project in the mock assurance that the ‘big ‘i’ word’ (line 1) does not refer to independence. The possible persuasiveness of the Project – contrary to the editorial agenda of the paper – is expressed in a third-person reference to the electorate as ‘People’ (line 2).

Extract: The Herald, 3 May 2016 (Scotland)

1	You can see this in the EU referendum, where the self-same Project Fear
2	that defeated independence only 18 months ago has been rolled out to
3	oppose Brexit. It has almost been a comic parody. Day by day the press has
4	been filled with stories about currency instability, firms leaving, black holes in
5	the financial accounts. Even President Obama has stepped in, as he did
6	before the independence referendum.
7	Becoming a new country, like leaving the EU, involves a leap of faith and
8	modern electorates don't like taking chances. Why should they? Most of the
9	middle classes in Scotland are comfortably off and don't want to lose their
10	security and privileges. Setting up a new independent nation is not as difficult
11	as the Project Fear propagandists claim, but it would inevitably involve
12	disruption, uncertainty and difficult choices.

In the *Herald* extract, having already been named in the headline, Project Fear is presented as an established political strategy, stressed in the popular alliterative modifier 'self-same' (line 1). Popular language, a register ordinarily alien to the formal expression associated with the *Herald*, is also apparent in the active metaphors 'rolled out' (line 2), 'stepped in' (line 5) and popular idiom 'leap of faith' (line 7). The exposure of the *Herald* readership to the implications of any outcome is emphasized in their presentation in the third person, this time with greater socio-specificity as 'the middle classes in Scotland', with a three-part list deployed in rehearsing the dangers they face in 'disruption, uncertainty and difficult choices' (line

12). Even though the *Herald* then supported the aims of the previous version of Project Fear, the agents responsible for the current iteration are described in the heavily stigmatised terms of ‘Project Fear propagandists’ (line 11).

In North Wales, the following *Daily Post* extract conveys a more muted tone with a positive narrative of economic prosperity proposed as a result of a potential Brexit:

Extract: Daily Post, 16 April 2016 (Wales)

1	[...]
2	Vote Leave coordinator Matthew McKinnon will claim that Wales' steel
3	industry could have a better chance of survival if the country votes to quit the
4	EU on June 23.
5	Making the case for Brexit, [Liam] Fox urged Welsh voters to turn down ‘EU
6	plans for a United States of Europe’.
7	He said: ‘Leaving the EU and taking back control of our own affairs would be
8	a huge boost to public services in Wales, with more money available for
9	hospitals, schools, and local services. Proponents of 'project fear' claim that
10	Wales will be worse off financially if we leave the EU, but there is no such
11	thing as EU money - it's already yours.’
12	[...]

‘Project fear’ is used by the prominent Leave spokesperson Liam Fox (line 9) in its characteristically pejorative form, providing a loaded and substituted term of reference to the Remain campaign. There is a subtle, but evident, distinction between the positive messages of hope mooted in the event of a Brexit outcome

(lines 2-4), which is juxtaposed against the framing of the excessive circumspection of the Remain side. The use of the term 'United States of Europe' (line 6), which likens the trajectory of the EU to the type of union observed between the United States of America, is itself a cynical rhetorical tactic designed to inject fear into the minds of voters – a fear rooted in the perceived progressive loss of British sovereignty.

This rhetorical commoditization of 'fear' (Chaput, 2010) that we see included in the quote attributed to Liam Fox is packaged together with messages that carry powerful political capital, particularly when imbedded amid key political components (lines 3 and 9) that speak to the lives of ordinary voters in Wales. In doing so, the Leave campaign successfully capitalize on combining the versatile power of a fear-based discourse hidden amid a tone of hope, while strategically labelling their opposition (the status quo) as the propagators of Project Fear.

Two months later, the following feature article from the South Wales *Evening Post* turns Project Fear on its head and frames the fear-based narrative as a positive position taken by the Remain campaign:

Extract (feature): Evening Post, 14 June 2016 (Wales)

1	[...]
2	I've never met anyone in the Swansea Bay region who can give me an
3	example of how they've been disadvantaged first-hand by Britain's
4	membership of the EU.
5	The leave camp label the arguments to stay as 'Project Fear'. They're damn
6	right.
7	I'm fearful about taking a leap in the dark for no more than vague and
8	contradictory promises of jam tomorrow from people who I implicitly distrust.
9	It's like standing in front of an electrified fence with someone nudging you in
10	the back telling you to ignore the warning sign.
11	Sorry and all that, but when the Bank of England, Sir Terry Matthews and a
12	small cast of Nobel prize-winning scientists collectively talk about exercising
13	caution then my instinct is to listen up.
14	I have no idea what will happen if Britain leaves the European Union and
15	that's the problem.

The writer introduces Project Fear as Leave campaign rhetoric (line 5) and promptly claims it (lines 5-6) to support the argument for a Remain vote in the rest of the article. In doing so, it further demonstrates the versatility of Project Fear and its appropriateness as a 'preconstructed' rhetorical weapon. The explicit outpouring of fear (line 7) is symbolic of the tangible anxieties of the British electorate in the run-up to the EU referendum campaign – déjà vu for voters in Scotland. In contrast to the *Daily Post* article, the tone of this piece is characterized by an openness and blatant honesty, which piggybacks the credibility of leading economists (lines 11-13) (also

featured in earlier extracts) in order to support the stance of the article, which in places conveys a tone of desperation.

So how is Project Fear dealt with in those newspapers that approve of exiting the EU and are therefore in accord with its overall purpose? What follows are references to Project Fear in the Leave supporting *Scottish Daily Mail* and *Scottish Daily Express*:

Extract: Slack, *Scottish Daily Mail*, 17 June 2016 (Scotland)

1	Yesterday, the Bank issued a fresh warning that the pound would be hit if
2	Britain leaves the EU. But, speaking before the suspension of campaigning
3	yesterday, Mr Johnson hit back, saying: 'We're obviously going to be hearing
4	Project Fear moving into its final fusillade.
5	'It has failed to make much of an impact because everyone can remember
6	what the PM said only a few months ago when he said Britain would do very
7	well outside of the EU. The pound is roughly where it has been. It is no lower
8	today than it has been in the last few months.

Extract: *Scottish Daily Express*, 15 June 2016 (Scotland)

1	I would like to think we have now reached peak Project Fear. Forget David
2	Cameron's warning that we would cause World War Three if we leave the
3	EU, bonkers as that scare tactic was. Forget the idea that we would suddenly
4	be plunged into a recession from which there will be no escape. In fact,
5	forget all the nonsense the Remain camp have spouted as they desperately
6	try to stop the British people voting to leave.

The first extract pursues the same story as a *Mail* extract above on the ‘warnings’ of a senior official from the Bank of England. On this occasion, the article refers to Project Fear, outsourced as a direct quotation from Brexit-supporting MP Boris Johnson. The statement and response arrangement in which Johnson’s words appear are presented in timely and vivid terms, with the bank’s contribution described as a ‘fresh warning’ and Johnson’s response expressed using the violent metaphor ‘hit back’, before Johnson develops this theme in his dismissal of Project Fear as a volley of shots (‘final fusillade’, line 4).

This reference to Project Fear in its dismissal is still more explicit in the next extract from the *Scottish Daily Express*. In dealing with the term itself, the prefix ‘peak’, denoting a fashion that has traversed its apex, is applied to Project Fear. An informal lexicon of dismissal is then scattered through the remainder of the extract, with the Project Fear-associated ‘scare tactics’ described using the mildly taboo term of bonkers, and the mockingly-exaggerated past participle ‘plunged’ in referring to the prospect of recession.

In summary, while there is ample evidence of newspapers’ willingness to entertain perspectives on the referendum that are not necessarily supportive of their editorial line, Project Fear offers a particular kind of discursive tool: one that enables the portrayal of the opposing arguments as marshalled and coordinated with particular political ends in mind, and therefore able to be dismissed on the basis of motive. The negative weight of ‘fear’ is consistent with Project Fear’s motivated status as an exercise in political cynicism. However, its overtly-contested status in public

discourse also enables its use towards giving prominence to such positive interpretations as the virtue of caution.

Tone of the debate

We have attempted to show that, for all their potency, discourses of fear and danger can be deployed flexibly and correspond with strategic uses of language. Indeed, contrary to the aims of 'Project Fear', earlier research by Huysmans (2000) shows how notions of imperilment can be mobilised against the European Union in dispute over policy. Across the European press too, Trenz (2007) shows how the relationship between the EU and its mediation can be characterised by 'struggle'. This chimes with the analysis of Stråth and Wodak (2009: 32), who describe any European public sphere as a maelstrom of competing narratives of national identity and interest, producing a mediated vision of the European Union that produces, in their words, 'an emphasis on crisis and value contention'.

Picking up in particular on Huysmans' theme of migration, Wodak (2015) discusses the political use of fear within discourses around right-wing populism. For Wodak, fear is directed towards establishing threats to national and cultural identity and producing grounds for 'othering' a politics of exclusion. Our own analysis develops Wodak's (2015: 72) argument that fear is mobilised in defence of a cultural and national ideal: a set of inherently-national norms that are under threat from outsiders and the imposition of diversity. In our analysis, discourses of fear extend across a variety of threats to the political settlement, including democratic challenges to constitutional state arrangements and established inter-state relationships. As

Chaput (2010) describes it, fear offers a means of generating an 'affective energy' in favour of commitment to the political status quo.

At the UK-wide level, this formed part of a more broadly-expressed set of concerns about the aggressiveness of the debate. Reflecting on the death of Labour MP Jo Cox, London Mayor Sadiq Khan characterized the referendum campaign until that point as producing a 'climate of hatred, of poison, of negativity, of cynicism' (quoted in Mason, 2016). While undoubtedly warranted by some of the public discourse, this drew upon and contributed to wider concerns around the poisoning of the well of public discourse.

Conclusion

It remains to be seen whether this campaign signals the shift from what Mouffe (2005) describes as an 'agonistic' clash of ideas to an 'antagonistic' trade of insult and spite. It may be that the bipolar character of a referendum, and the comparative loosening of the bonds of party, encourages a more rancorous mode of engagement. However, the Scottish experience of the two campaigns suggests that the tone of the campaign is as much determined by such conditions as the political personas involved and the stakes of their involvement. In Wales, perhaps driven by the nation's historic battle to maintain and develop industrial continuity, and questions about how EU membership has benefitted that battle, the tone of the debate on both sides seems to have centred on concerns related to employment and economic prosperity.

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