

A DIVIDED NATION

Media Representations of the North-South Divide in England

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I rode over the mountains to Huddersfield and a wilder people I never saw in all England. The men, women and children filled the streets as we rode along and appeared just ready to devour us. They were, however, tolerably quiet while I preached; only a few pieces of dirt were thrown.

- John Wesley, June 1757

1. Introduction

In 1987, the *Observer* published a cartoon that showed a smartly-dressed couple dancing, laughing and drinking champagne under a southern, sunny sky, while at the other side of the frame, a stern-looking middle-aged couple wearing flat caps beneath a rainy cloud, complaining “they’ve got their prime minister, why can’t we have ours?” (Fawkes). The cartoon was more than a mere comical, stereotypical representation of the perceived cultural, political and socio-economic gap between north and south England; it succinctly captured the public discourse of the North-South divide that was prevalent throughout the 1980s. In the late 1980s, for instance, numerous newspapers highlighted the divide between the poor north and the rich south by using strong language that summarised the disparity between the regions (Lewis and Townsend 1-2). Seven years later, *The Economist* published an article in which northerners were seen as “victims of decaying smokestack industry”, while southerners could freely enjoy “the beneficiaries of new high-tech, finance, scientific and service industries” (Crichfield 4). *Sunday Times* evoked a similar idea by stating that Britain “is an increasingly divided nation. (...) The poor are certainly concentrated in the old, one-industry towns and decaying inner cities of the north” (qtd. in Shields 240).

In the 1990s, the debate had far from ceased: the economic recessions of the eighties had their repercussions on the north whilst London had emerged as the financial capital of the world, resulting in a *The Guardian* reporter stating that the difference between north and south was now “as great as between the British and the Italians” (qtd. in Russell 288). At the brink of the twenty-first century, *The Guardian* recognised the scale of the debate and launched a special web page, archiving all articles dealing with the divide. News coverage therefore showed that the North-South debate was not solely reserved for academia, but had also found its way into the public discourse.

It is unclear, however, how recent news coverage has covered the divide, something that critics argue still finds a steady basis in reality on multiple levels and should not be overlooked. Dave Russell, for example, states that cultural outlets like film, television, music and theatre reinforce long-established prejudicial and stereotypical views of the north, drawing back on the region's working-class history both in humorous and degrading ways (185). Apart from cultural differences, Andy Griffiths and Allan Williams point out economic inequalities and claim that the twentieth and twenty-first century have seen a relative economic decline for the North in comparison to the South (1). Consecutive recent governments, in contrast, have downplayed the existence of the gap, dismissing stark regional differences in health and employment and arguing that a difference between rich and poor can be found in any region in England (González 67). Still, the discrepancies between north and south continue to show up on maps of socio-economic indicators and are a legacy of England's shift from an industrial to a post-industrial society (Green 179).

The question is then whether English newspapers, as in the past, highlight the North-South divide in all its facets or follow the government line of non-regional policy and denial of the gap's existence instead. Given the power of the press, it is necessary to examine in what way newspapers contribute to the North-South debate and whether they perpetuate ideas of a 'north' and 'south' or dismiss them altogether. Although previous research has merely focused on national news, local coverage has to be taken into consideration as it can reflect and influence the opinion of the community just as much as national coverage. Taking *critical discourse analysis* and *framing* — as set out by Fairclough and Iyengar and McGrady — as theoretical paradigms, this dissertation will focus upon lexical devices as well as how information is prioritised in the news to establish how both local and national newspapers contribute to the North-South debate. By contrasting and comparing local and national news

coverage, this study will establish whether English newspapers subscribe to the notion of the North-South divide.

After dealing with the history of the North-South divide, this paper will explore theoretical and methodological paradigms, after which the focus will be on the political economy of the media and the analysis of the corpus data.

2. History of the North-South Divide

As early as the nineteenth century, Victorian writer Elizabeth Gaskell popularised the idea of a divided England by contrasting the sophisticated southerner with the savage yet warm-hearted northerner in her novel *North and South* (1855). Decades later, George Orwell drew back on more tangible realities and highlighted the socio-economic differences between the north and south in *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937), focusing upon the detrimental effects of industrialisation on working class life up north. He distinguished the two different regions in England by arguing that, “when you go to the industrial North you are conscious (...) of entering a strange country. This is partly because of certain real differences which do exist, but still more because of the North-South antithesis which has been rubbed into us for such a long time past” (109). Yet, The North-South debate has not been limited to the literary sphere: over the decades, the discussion on the affluent south contrasting with the poor north has found its way into scholarly discourse, with economists and historians emphasising the deep-rooted division between the two parts of the country and calling for policies to tackle regional inequalities (Russell 5).

Before touching upon the history and current relevance of the gap it is necessary to define what constitutes the ‘north’ and ‘south’ respectively. The scholarly consensus is that the divide follows a rough line drawn from the rivers Wash to the Severn, which separates the

English lowlands from the highlands (Baker and Billinge 21). Dave Russell claims this interpretation is based on twentieth-century economic divisions that have seen the most prosperous regions to the south of this line (15). Although inter-local differences still remain, the Wash-Severn division is nonetheless accurate when discussing the relative concentration of issues related to prosperity, health, the housing market, government expenditure, job prospects, political influence and culture (Green 194).

Critics claim that the North-South gap is not only firmly rooted in recent imbalance, but also in earlier history. Helen Jewell demonstrates that when the Romans invaded Britain, they focused upon the commercially valuable southeast, as the region had become an emerging market economy due to arable cultivation, whereas the terrain in the north rendered it impossible for communities to develop in a similar pace (9-11). Consequently, the north was already “classified as culturally inferior, and economically unsophisticated” (10), explaining the pull of London and the south during Roman, Danish and Norman rule.

The trend reversed when the textile centres, shipyards and mill and mining towns up north began to eclipse London during the Industrial Revolution. The north enjoyed great prosperity and was considered as the economic backbone of the country. Yet, when other countries industrialised and excelled beyond Great Britain in branches of industry, education and technology, the “balance was slowly beginning to shift back from north to south” (Smith 18). The decline of the north was further marked by the Great Depression of the interwar years, when the old northern industries were greatly affected, leaving the power shifting toward the lighter industries in the south again (20). During this period the North-South divide began to take serious shape economically as well as politically: the new consumer-based industries of the South enjoyed great prosperity as a result of major expansion and a change in retailing, all “built upon the spending power of the South” (26), whilst the north suffered a steady decline in economic performance. When Margaret Thatcher assumed power

in 1979, her policies of de-industrialisation, privatisation and centralisation had a devastating effect on the north: not only were the industrial areas in the north hit hardest when industries were shut down, leaving coal miners and textile industry workers out of jobs, the increased centralisation of power meant that local authorities lost control over their expenditure (Blake 10).

As the recession and the rising unemployment rates in the eighties affected the north much more than the south, the media picked up on the case and started covering the North-South debate extensively. Thatcher, however, denied the existence of a divide altogether, stating, “I don’t think there is anything like the North-South Divide that some people like to think” (qtd. in Shields 241). Tony Blair followed the Thatcherite neoliberal dogma and downplayed the existence of the North-South divide by debunking it as “a myth” (“Blair: North-South Divide a Myth” 1). Soon after the 2010 elections, the Cameron ministry pursued this ideological campaign and decided to abolish the Regional Development Agencies and Regional Strategies, hereby withdrawing any funding from the central government and subsequently undermining the debate on regional inequalities. Due to widespread disagreement among the elite, scholars and the general public with regard to the North-South divide in both past and present, it is evident the divide is not as clear-cut as some would suggest.

3. Corpus

Following Russell’s definition of the ‘north’ and the ‘south’, this study focuses upon two local, northern newspapers and two national, London-based broadsheet newspapers. These chosen newspapers are considered as being of prime importance in terms of readership and influence. *Manchester Evening News* and *Liverpool Echo* are the most widely read newspapers in northern England with an average daily circulation of 90,873 and 85,463 in

2011 respectively (“How the Regional Dailies Performed”). The two chosen national newspapers, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times*, are the most popular quality newspapers in England, selling an average of 651,184 and 457,250 copies in 2011 respectively on a daily basis (“National Newspaper ABC Figures 2011”).

The analysis is based on a selection of 38 news items in the northern newspapers and 48 articles in the national edition of the national newspapers published between 1 April 2011 and 1 April 2012, a time period that was chosen for its accurate reflection of the most recent development of the North-South debate. Electronic database LexisNexis was used to access articles dealing with at least one aspect of the North-South divide, whether in political, economic or cultural terms¹. News articles only were used, to the exclusion of features, leaders/editorials and other opinionated pieces to keep the data as balanced and uniform as possible.

4. Theoretical and Methodological Frameworks

As far back as 1922, Walter Lippmann analysed the relationship between media and public: the news media, he said, are windows to the vast world beyond our direct experience, and determine our cognitive maps of that world (cited in McCombs 3). Public opinion is, in turn, shaped by the environment created by the news media, rather than by events themselves (ibid.). Although this by no means entails that viewers and readers are passive and merely swallow news stories by an omnipotent media, the media have the power to initiate and highlight items and as a result play a big role in constructing our ideas of reality. The notion that media initiate items for the public agenda is called agenda-setting: this selective process helps shaping people’s thoughts on reality (McCombs 6). One aspect of agenda setting is the

¹ The following search terms were used when retrieving the articles: North-South divide, North-South gap, northerners [and] southerners, northern [and] identity, southern [and] identity, northernness, southernness.

media's ability to 'frame' the news. According to Iyengar and McGrady, framing "refers to the way in which opinions about an issue can be altered by emphasizing or de-emphasizing particular facets of that issue" (219). Framing analysis not only deals with lexical items, but also looks at the contextualisation of social, historical and cultural topics. The way the news is framed therefore tells us about underlying assumptions of what is important in society.

Whereas frame analysis retains its methodological roots in linguistic analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA) finds its origins in the social analysis of discourse and deals with language that stretches further than the written word (Taylor, Wetherell and Yates 229). In critical discourse analysis, social reality plays a central role; language is not static, but is instead a product of its social context. According to one of its developers, Norman Fairclough, CDA is concerned with how language figures as an element in social processes (229). It is inherently interdisciplinary as it evokes a dialogue between linguistic analysis, such as framing, and disciplines that deal with researching social, political and economic practices (230). Critical discourse analysts focus upon the text as a multi-semiotic entity: that is, texts increasingly combine language with other semiotic elements such as photographs and graphic design, which have become important factors in the evaluation of written texts (4). Yet, as the articles used for this study were retrieved via an online database and consequently do not appear in their original status, this study will confine itself to the texts and their contextual interpretations.

Apart from textual analysis and contextualisation, CDA deals with other connections between language and social life. Firstly, it asks how language is used within relations of conflict, power and dominance: texts carry the power that reflects the interests of those who speak, subsequently revealing how sources of power are initiated, maintained and reproduced (ibid.). Secondly, CDA is critical in the sense that it is "committed to progressive social change; it has an emancipatory interest" (ibid.). In other words, CDA is constantly

scrutinising the media, its language and its power to influence, organise and shape their readership's understandings of reality, giving resonance to certain images and producing meaning within discourse. CDA is then a circular process in which "social practices influence texts, via shaping the context and mode in which they are produced, and in turn texts help influence society via shaping the viewpoints of those who read or otherwise consume them" (Richardson 27). The very basis of *doing CDA*, as Norman Fairclough suggests in *Critical Discourse Analysis*, starts with analysing the text itself (2). In *Media Discourse*, Fairclough sets out two important points on which the analysis of the corpus of this paper will be based:

1. How are texts (...) produced, and in what ways are they likely to be interpreted and used?
2. What wider sociocultural process is this text a part of, what are its wider social conditions, and what are its likely effects? (201-5)

Utilising these questions as a guideline, this study relates the linguistic elements of the text to the social context in which they appear.

Moreover, Fairclough stresses the importance of the political economy of the media in *Critical Discourse Analysis*. The economy of the media, he argues, is an "important determinant of its practices and its texts" (40). For example, it is argued that the reliance of newspapers on advertising changes newspaper content as newspapers have become vehicles through which businesses can sell their product, rendering news media vulnerable to pressures from the commercial media market. Related to the issue of advertising and the media as profit-making institutions is the issue of ownership where because of horizontal and vertical integration, leading media conglomerates have come to dominate commercial media markets (McChesney 28). Consequently, market domination and economic control have been translated into social, cultural and political power that affect public opinion. Fairclough argues that the concentration of ownership "manifests itself in various ways, including the

manner in which media organisations are structured to ensure that the dominant voices are those of the political and social establishments” (43). The reliance on economic—and elite—forces therefore undermines the required objective role of the media.

5. Ownership

In the Western print media, the concentration of ownership has long been the subject of intense debate. Not only do mergers and take-overs cause uniformity in the newsrooms, media conglomerations also have the power to exert a strong influence on public attitudes. In the United Kingdom, the power of mega-mergers has never been more evident, with the five largest owners controlling 72.5 per cent of the media market (Bromley 45). The three biggest corporations, News International, Trinity Mirror and Daily Mail and General Trust/Northcliffe/Associated, in turn amount to 360 titles, including the largest circulating newspapers in the United Kingdom (ibid.). The economic strength of these conglomerations has enhanced their position in society so they have become dominant political institutions led by an all-powerful proprietor whose economic interests and political preferences “continue to be the most important determinant of a news outlet's editorial line” (McNair 42). The most well-known owner is Rupert Murdoch, whose political stance has had a great impact on his newspapers’ ideological affiliations. Over the years, he has frequently intervened directly by imposing a particular editorial line that reflected his own political and business interests (50). When he bought *The Times* from the Thomson family in 1981, for instance, his voice was soon heard within the newsroom. Although Murdoch himself said that the “law and the independent board prevented him from exercising editorial control” (Duthel 141), McNair argues that news that could harm Murdoch’s business was censored, whilst journalists who went against the newspaper’s editorial policy suffered “professional death” (50-1).

The Daily Telegraph has had to deal with horizontal integration as well; most recently, it was taken over by Telegraph Media Group, a subsidiary of Press Holdings, owned by the Barclay family. Like *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* is not free from the influence of its proprietor. Its previous owner, member of the British House of Lords Conrad Black, used the newspaper as a vehicle for his conservative ideology (Lorimer 91). The current owners have pushed this conservative angle, appointing a Conservative member of the House of Lords as the Executive Director of the Telegraph Media Group and openly backing the Conservative Party during elections.

Over the years, media conglomerates have not only come to dominate the media market by controlling the national press, but also by taking over local media organisations. In 1995, for example, Trinity International Holdings became the largest regional publisher by buying all of Thomson Corporation's English titles, including *Liverpool Echo* and *Manchester Evening News* (Granville 85). This has changed the regional media landscape entirely in terms of printing, advertising, management, finance and personnel resources (88). Larger regional groups aim for the highest profit, subsequently pursuing a course of maximised (advertising) revenue whilst aiming at minimal production costs (Franklin 7). In order to sustain profitability, however, media businesses have had to centralise the printing of local newspapers and cut in journalistic staff (10). The reduction of staff, in turn, has had a detrimental effect on the newspapers' quality and diversity. According to Franklin, the majority of staff work in centralised teams and have little knowledge of the city or region in which the paper circulates (ibid.). Additionally, journalists increasingly rely on either external sources from large press agencies or press releases from local councils: although this method has a high economic efficiency, "the tie with the local community is ruptured" (ibid.). The role of journalists as mere copywriters and gatekeepers of official or 'safe' information in turn undermines the watchdog function the media ought to have (Curran 217).

Consequently, any debate on a newspaper's agenda and its effect on the readership cannot avoid taking ownership and the political economy of the media into consideration. While *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* follow particular editorial lines as a result of their proprietor's interests, both *Liverpool Echo* and *Manchester Evening News* rely on official sources as a result of shrinking newsrooms and the centralisation of information. Whether the news articles of the corpus support this argument will be explored in the conclusion.

6. Analysis

Qualitative content analysis, which involved the identification of news frames and systematically grouping articles to determine similarities and differences, showed that *Liverpool Echo* and *Manchester Evening News* on the one hand and *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Times* on the other broadly cover the same themes with regard to the North-South divide. As can be seen in table 1, the gap is discussed in terms of transport, (un)employment, the property market, business, the overall economy of the country, health, (cultural) identity, sports and (de)centralisation, the only deviations to his pattern being one article related to education and one to water supplies.

Theme	Local newspapers		National newspapers	
	Number of Articles	%	Number of Articles	%
Transport	10	26	3	6
(Un)employment	5	13	10	21
Property market	5	13	19	40
Business	4	10,5	8	17
Health	4	10,5	1	2
Economy	3	8	3	6
(Cultural) identity	3	8	2	4
(De)centralisation	2	5	-	-
Sports	1	3	1	2
Water supply	1	3	-	-
Education	-	-	1	2
Total	38	100	48	100

Table 1: The distribution of themes across the corpus

Yet, despite the overall similarity in topics, the local and national newspapers use different rhetorical devices to formulate events, subsequently reflecting diverging views on events and constructing worlds in which certain assumptions and ideas hold true. These worlds are not merely created by assigning more importance to particular themes over others, but also by choices made within the texts themselves. Before we look at the predominant frames found when analysing the corpus, the focus will be on the selections of topics that made it into the newspapers and how they can be linked to wider sociocultural processes.

Although qualitative analysis was used to analyse the articles and connect them to theory and context, quantitative analysis—in this case the number of articles devoted to a certain topic—illustrates the content bias of the newspapers in question. As each newspaper follows an editorial line, it is expected that news often favours one side rather than providing equivalent treatment for both sides in a conflict. This agenda-setting role of the media influences public opinion and changes how much importance readers assign to certain issues. For example, table 1 shows that the most discussed topic with regard to the North-South divide in *Liverpool Echo* and *Manchester Evening News* deals with transport (26 per cent), whereas the national newspapers only devote three articles to transport (6 per cent). This gap in coverage is related to the topic of these items: a planned high-speed rail network connecting Liverpool and Manchester with London. The train line will specifically benefit the north as it links the industrial cities with the wealthier south and continental Europe; consequently, the two local newspapers are more inclined to stress the railway's urgency than their southern counterparts. Similarly, the articles on a North-South divide in health are covered more thoroughly in the local newspapers, as news about the poor health levels in the north poses a more tangible threat to northerners than to southerners. The same holds true for the items on (de)centralisation and water supplies, issues that have more resonance and relevance in the north because they deal with problems that directly affect northerners.

Articles on the property market, in turn, receive significantly more attention in the national newspapers (40 per cent) than in the local ones (13 per cent), due to the rising property prices in the south compared to the decreasing value of houses up north. As the national newspapers are London-based and have a large southern readership, there is a need to stress the crisis and how it affects the south negatively, whilst the northern newspapers assign less importance to increasing property prices down south as those issues have no local relevance. Business (17 against 10.5 per cent) and (un)employment (21 against 15 per cent) are touched upon more frequently in national newspapers as well, due to the limited business scope in local newspapers, compared to more comprehensive business sections in the national ones. Topics that make it into the news are therefore never chosen randomly, but rather reflect how much weight the media give to certain issues (Entman 338).

However, the way in which reporters frame the news is just as important as it deals with moral — and often political — evaluations. A large number of articles of the corpus consisted of lexical choices that reflected the stance of the newspaper in question. From these readings five major frames were identified: the *Problem frame*, the *Elite frame*, the *Action frame*, the *Victimisation frame* and the *Us and Them frame*. Although every article could be placed in one of these frames, *Manchester Evening News (MEN)* and *Liverpool Echo (LE)* in contrast to *The Daily Telegraph (DT)* and *The Times (TT)* employed each frame differently. This study will focus upon the comparative analysis of the differences in the nature of frames and the link with critical discourse analysis.

The Problem Frame

The problem frame deals with issues that have resulted from a culture of fear, highlighted and perpetuated by the mass media. David Altheide states that the frame “promotes a discourse of fear that may be defined as the pervasive communication, symbolic awareness and

expectation that danger and risk are a central feature of the effective environment” (648). In other words, news can promote a public discourse of fear by highlighting social abuses and other pervasive problems in society, whilst refraining from providing the public with background information. Seeing as readers are provided with information that is not solution-based but problem-based, they are left in fear. According to Altheide, the problem frame then implies the following:

- Something exists that is undesirable;
- Many people are affected by this problem (it is relevant);
- Unambiguous aspects or parts are easily identified;
- It can be changed or “fixed”;
- There is a mechanism or procedure for fixing the problem;
- The change or repair agent and process is known. (655)

The analysis of the corpus revealed that in all newspapers, the *problem frame* was employed in the case of business, the property market or (un)employment, focusing upon telling numbers and figures and refraining from explaining the causes underpinning these problems.

In *DT* and *TT*, articles dealing with the emerging North-South jobs divide consist of jobs figures published by leading job institutes, accompanied by strong terms that highlight the North-South divide. For example, *DT* describes the northeast as being the “worst affected area” in terms of unemployment and stresses that “an unemployment map by the union shows that Britain is riven by a marked North-South divide” (Hall 8). Yet, while the newspaper implies the problem can be fixed, the article lacks any explanation for the growing divide and solutions to solve regional inequalities. Despite the agent (the government) required to fix the problems being known, the newspaper abstains from any clear political evaluations and instead produces a discourse of fear that does not anticipate either short or long-term improvements. A similar occurrence can be found in *TT*: in one item a North-South divide in

residential values is demonstrated, pointing out a “clear divide in the country” (Hipwell 46) between London and the South East and the North of England. Again, a certain problem is highlighted and the mechanisms that could fix this problem are implicitly mentioned; yet, the sole purpose of the article is to inform the public about persisting problems in society rather than providing solutions and comfort. Although strong wording such as a “widening gulf” (Steele 8), “a worsening North-South divide” that is “more difficult [to close] than ever” (Fleming 53) and “bleak picture for house prices” (Hopkins 34) seem to call for government measures that end the “boom-gloom divide” (Pitel 11), the articles never stretch beyond the simplistic description of the North-South divide.

The local newspapers employ the *Problem frame* much less frequently than *DT* and *TT*. The few articles that are *Problem*-framed, however, consist of an easy North-South narrative to explain certain situations to the public comparable to coverage in *DT* and *TT*. Articles that deal with the property market and unemployment, for example, highlight an “ever-widening” (Stewart 2) and “growing North-South divide” that is “splitting the country” (Ferguson 40), but this simplistic polarisation of the country nonetheless lacks any background information. By drawing back on existing presumptions in society and creating a legacy of fear, this kind of discourse in turn allows newspapers to mobilise the public on behalf of their political or moral cause (Altheide 648).

Compared to *DT* and *TT*, *MEN* and *LE* contain less *Problem*-framed articles because these local newspapers often give very clear evaluative and moral spins to their articles, subsequently placing news items in the *Action*, *Victim* or *Us and Them* frames. These differences in framing can be explained through Fairclough’s analysis in *Media Discourse* that texts are based upon certain lexical choices and that alternative choices might always have been made (201): discourse in *MEN* and *LE* is articulated differently as a result of the underlying sociocultural processes articles are a part of (ibid.).

The Elite Frame

While the *Problem Frame* retains scope for newspapers to express their own views and implicitly hold officials responsible for societal ills, *Elite*-framed articles draw back on elite voices and leave out any subjectivity within the text altogether. According to Lance Bennett, news is indexed to the official debate, which means that journalists highlight and define important issues within the centres of power (108-10). As a result of the dominance of official viewpoints, coverage will reflect elite consensus. Analysis shows that *DT* and *TT* mirror the opinions of official sources and powerful corporations as frequently as *MEN* and *LE*. Especially in articles that describe the North-South divide through statistics and numbers, the newspapers' voices merge with those of powerful institutions. The articles primarily consist of quotes and data obtained from governmental reports or surveys conducted by major corporations.

The article "Prices Steady Nationwide, Says Builder" is entirely constructed of both direct and indirect quotes from one of Britain's biggest home building companies (45). Another article called "How the Slump in House Sales Has Widened a Gulf" follows the same principle and presents the builder's viewpoints as given facts (Steele 8-9). In *DT*, *Elite*-framed articles are primarily constructed by messages of official sources: "Survey Shows 'Flattening Out' in Demand for New Workers" merely consists of the direct quotes of the managing director of the biggest online recruitment agency in Britain (5). Consequently, the national newspapers appear to be mere reproducers of facts and show certain issues from one point of view. Nearly all *Elite*-framed articles also downplay the idea of a North-South divide, whether in terms of housing prices or unemployment. Again, the denial of the gap's existence is made clear through the voice of officials: the chief executive of a house building group, for example, states that the North-South housing market divide is exaggerated and that it is "not the black-and-white scenario it is being made out to be" (Hipwell 45). Elsewhere, a large firm

claims that the “extent of the divide is overstated” (“Linden to Feed Demand”). National newspapers therefore follow elite consensus that the North-South divide does not find a basis in reality as they do not provide the readers with counter-arguments to reports of established companies and elite sources.

In *MEN* and *LE*, a similar pattern can be found. Unlike *DT* and *TT*, only one article understates the current relevance of the divide through the eyes of an influential house building company (Jupp 41). The other articles, however, reflect the opinions of important northern elites, such as the Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce stating, “there still is very much a North-South divide” (“Business Bosses Say Confidence Growing” 35). In addition, a significant Scotland-based public transport company that operates mainly in northern England warns of a “growing North-South divide” (“FirstGroup Slides 14pc” 45). Although the articles are built around quotes and official sources, these sources stress the existence of the divide, underlining the idea that northern newspapers acknowledge its relevance much more than the national newspapers. Again, the difference between the articles can be understood through Fairclough’s CDA: texts are not written in a social vacuum, but they are shaped by institutional and social structures (Mayr 10). As a result, newspapers reflect certain ideological views through different vocabularies and the presences and absences of particular discourses (ibid.). The decision of *LE* and *MEN* to include the voice of powerful northern institutions and people highlights the idea that their newspaper content reflects their ideological positions.

The Action Frame

Whereas the *Problem* and *Elite Frame* primarily rely on external evaluations, the *Action frame* deals with explicit moral claims that encourage readers, governmental and other players to take action in order to achieve a certain outcome. *Action*-framing is a framework that

“explains how newspapers facilitate developing collective cognitive frames to justify certain activities and encourage wider participation” (Kidd and Chen 54). Put differently, the frame deals with the idea that something needs to be done, or should not be done. *DT* and *TT* in contrast to *MEN* and *LE* employ the *Action frame* much more regularly, inciting particular actions or courses.

In *DT*, for example, two articles about the planned rail network between Manchester and London discuss the high costs of the railway, how it “will do nothing to bridge the divide” and how those backing the plans have a “tunnel vision” (Ruddick 1). The newspaper opposes the campaign and claims that the spending of £32billion cannot be justified “at a time of national austerity with rising unemployment and a massive deficit” (Millward 4). Seeing as a railway will benefit the north more than it will the south, *DT* is less inclined to back government plans for a new train line. However, the other three articles that are *Action*-framed in *DT* and *TT* underline the reality of the North-South divide and instigate governmental action designed to close the gap. One article sets out several points made by Labour and Lib Dem politicians, economists, business and think-thanks that call for coordinated action, combined with contextual information about the divide (Asthana 1). Opposing views are never given and the newspaper advocates action against a growing gap between north and south. This not only contradicts the *Elite*-framed articles that undermine the North-South divide, but it also challenges idea that *DT* and *TT* manufacture consent for the political party their proprietors support, as their critique on the lack of attention given to regional inequalities refutes the government case.

The *Action Frame* is much more evident in *MEN* and *LE*. Articles on transport and health are framed in such a way that action is the only way to close the gap. In terms of transport, news items highlight voices in favour of the “badly needed” high-speed rail link, which is essential to “breaking down regional divides” (Waddington 15). An item in *MEN*

called “Buffoon Boris’s cheek over high speed rail plan” mentions that if London’s mayor Boris Johnson opposes to the railway plans, the north “will start building” (“Buffoon Boris’s Cheek” 24), hereby underlining both the rivalry between north and London and the necessity of the line for northerners. Additionally, *MEN* and *LE* call for measures that could end the health divide: the article “A North South Divide of Death” in *LE* reveals that “tremendous work needs to be done” to combat the “inequalities that exist” (Williams 4). The economic divide, too, needs to be tackled, and *MEN* pressures for government support to “stimulate the investment and confidence that is lacking at present” (Feddy 42). The differences in frequency and nature of the *Action frame* expose the ideologies that are constructed, reflected and reinforced in newspaper discourse, a topic CDA is very much concerned with (Mayr 10). The local newspapers call for action with much more vigour than national newspapers, advocating the closure of the gap by using the *Action-frame*.

The Victimisation Frame

The *Victimisation frame* portrays one group in society as victims of abuses of power by other groups, particularly by the government. This technique lays blame on those who cause people to suffer, hereby shielding the victims from any responsibility and posing the other as a threat to people’s cultural and economic achievements in life. In the context of the North-South debate, it is expected that the northerners, who have generally suffered poorer health conditions, worse job losses and a longer economic slump than those down south, are seen as the victims of the divide, whereas southerners and/or the government are held responsible for these conditions.

The few articles that are *Victimisation*-framed in *DT* and *TT* underline this and assign the role of the victim to the northerner. One article in *DT* quotes a research that suggests that companies in the north have a “higher chance of going bust if [the] company is based in the

North than if its headquarters are below Watford” (Hurley 29), hereby pointing out the unequal treatment the north receives. In an article on horseracing, *TT* evokes a similar sentiment by stating that the “North has been raped” because of “shrunk and unbalanced programmes” (Lee 97), whilst all jumping meetings continue being scheduled in the south. The newspaper argues that the situation for northern trainers has reached “crisis point” (97). The London 2012 Olympics, too, provoke a vivid discussion: the Olympics “are blamed for a renewed North-South divide as a widening gap emerges in the housing market and the number of businesses showing signs of distress” (Lea 39). By drawing upon several voices, numbers and figures, the newspaper points out that the Olympics have not brought the investments and jobs up north, whilst it has benefited the economy down south. Yet, when it comes to housing prices, the national newspapers assign the role of the victim to southerners, who are prevented from “moving out of rented accommodation” because of the North-South divide in housing prices. *TT* mentions that “every area in the North East [is] deemed affordable”, but that “no homes [are] affordable in London” and that “conditions for potential first time buyers remain tough” (Hosking 35) in the south. When the North-South divide has a negative effect on life down south, the national newspapers employ the *Victimisation frame*.

MEN and *LE*, in turn, go great lengths to emphasise northerners’ — in their eyes — marginalised position in society. Strong words, such as “old heavy industries (...) were sacrificed on the altar” (Hernon 26), “profits go south” (“Profits Go South” 32) and the depiction of northerners being “the biggest victims” (“Economy’s North-South Divide” 50) all add to underlying sentiments of injustice. In *MEN*, Boris Johnson is labelled a “hardnosed Thatcherite” who does “his best for affluent London at the expensive of us in Greater Manchester” (“Buffoon Boris’s Cheek” 24). The newspaper draws back on deep-rooted feelings of inequality, with the south being the dominant player and the north the victim. Indeed, when the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) rejected a bid to restore a Merseyside ship

restoration project, a *LE* reporter stressed the social exclusion and downgraded position of northerners and the all-powerful south by commenting “having given burned-out Cutty Sark pounds 23m, at Greenwich, do we assume HLF is guilty of adhering to the North-South divide?” (Elson 12). The *Victimisation frame* therefore provides the newspapers to lay blame for societal ills elsewhere, rendering one group as victims and subsequently evoking empathy with the public. Because *DT* and *TT* only occasionally focus on the marginalisation of the northerner whilst *MEN* and *LE* generate a distinct voice that pleas for the breaking down of regional inequalities, power structures behind the newspapers are laid bare. CDA claims that newspapers mirror the ideologies and interests of the group they serve (Mayr 11); in this case, the local newspapers are much more concerned with the northerner than the national newspapers.

The Us and Them Frame

The *Us and Them frame* seeks to mobilise one group of people against another group that exhibits diverging, inferior views. The depictions of the north and south fit into the *Orientalism* theory put forward by Edward Said in 1978, a framework that serves to explain the position of the north, the inferior ‘Other’, as an internal colony, ruled by the south. Because of these historical positions, the ‘north’ and ‘south have become “populist metaphors for two different versions of Englishness” (Baker and Billinge 9). These different notions of Englishness keep recurring in the news in the form of a struggle over power: while *MEN* and *LE* stress northern cultural identity and the potential for growth in the northern regions, *DT* and *TT* emphasises southern superiority through puns and language that depicts the rift between the north and south. In *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough argues that the discursive events of newspapers are instances of sociocultural practices (56): practices that

find their roots in the historical economic, political and cultural North-South divide and are now perpetuated by newspapers.

Few articles in *DT* and *TT*, however, employ the *Us and Them frame*. Despite these newspapers being London-based, they have to cater to a national readership, which means that sensitive subjects that could provoke an outcry have to be levelled out to make space for more neutrally-toned articles. The articles that do fit into the *Us and Them* framework often contain vivid language: in *DT*, the distance between the two regions is not only stressed by calling “the North East [being] a million miles from the Olympic movement”, the reporter also mentions that the “gap that separates them from London is not merely physical” (Grey-Thompson 12-13). These descriptions help creating the idea that England consists of two separate nations. Other articles fall back on this idea and describe the North-South divide through catchy phrases: two article titles, for instance, refer to an old joke about the gloomy north, saying “it’s glum up north” (Rayner 5) and “it’s grim up north” (Lea 39) when referring to the lack of royal wedding festivities and enthusiasm for the Olympics. These moral judgements highlight the region’s inferiority because of the “apathy shown in the north”, while “in marked contrast, hundreds of events are organised in the Home Counties” by southerners who do “get on and have fun” (Rayner 5).

In *MEN* and *LE*, an *Us and Them* distinction is even more evident; the manifestations of regional and local pride are most visible in articles that deal with cultural identity and the centralisation of political power. *MEN* notes that “Northern lights shine bright”, as a new “super northern [rugby] club full of home-grown heroes” is created. It is stated that “we love success here in the North-West” and that the “future is in the kids of the North-West” (Leigh 10). These descriptions polarise the North-South debate, as the ability of the north to grow without southern interference is highlighted. Furthermore, *MEN* describes Greater Manchester as having the “right talent, the perfect geographic location, a colourful cultural identity” and

being a “brilliant place to be” (Donohue 4). The people in the region not only believe “we have a great product”, but also want to “dispel the myth of the city as grimy” (“Always Something Going on” 10). The newspaper even compares Manchester with Birmingham, which has a “lack of identity”, whereas Manchester is more “northern and unique than Birmingham which is too linked to London” (ibid.). Birmingham is therefore seen as being a separate entity from the north, an idea that only enhances the industrial north of being a separate nation. The same assumption is applicable to the items that deal with centralisation. In both articles, the necessity for regional political bodies and the North-West Regional Development Agency is stressed: *MEN* states that northerners need to have “more authority” through a “devolved government” that gives “the north of England more powers” (Carr 9). The *Us and Them*-framing in *MEN* and *LE* thus perpetuates notions of ‘northernness’ and ‘southernness’ to show a clear rift between the regions.

7. Conclusion

With help of framing and critical discourse analysis this study reveals that the northern newspapers and national newspapers cover the North-South divide in diverse manners: not only do the newspapers make different choices with regard to the selection of items that make it into the news (agenda-setting), they also draw back on lexical choices that mirror an editorial stance (framing). Although *DT*, *TT*, *MEN* and *LE*, commonly use the same frames, these are employed differently: the stories published in national newspapers primarily follow the format of consensus, with *Elite* and *Problem* frames having the upper hand. There are deviations to this pattern, such as the victimisation of the southerner because of rising housing prices in one article; yet, when comparing the nature of this frame with the majority of the articles in *MEN* and *LE*, which are *Us and Them* and *Victim*-framed, *DT* and *TT* have different ways of describing the North-South divide. Whereas the national newspapers follow official

sources that downplay the existence of the divide much more frequently, the local newspapers primarily deal with pointing out regional inequalities and differences on all levels.

Consequently, the newspapers perpetuate different ideas of 'northernness' and 'southernness'. When *DT* and *TT* acknowledge the divide, the North-South description seems to be a simplified narrative that helps to expose problems in society, without newspapers having to provide background information or solutions. As a result, the reader lacks an understanding of the deeply-rooted divisions highlighted by critics. In *MEN* and *LE*, the focus on economic, political and cultural inequalities is much more evident, with northerners being portrayed as victims of policies imposed on them by (southern) elites through *Victimisation* and *Us and them* frames. This appeal to pathos, a rhetoric device that persuades the audience to a certain viewpoint on the basis of emotion, creates a bond between reader and writer and gives an insight into the newspapers' values and beliefs at the same time (Durant and Lambrou 29).

How does this tie in with the political economy of the media? As the national newspapers seem to cite elite sources more frequently than local newspapers, it can be argued that *DT* and *TT* follow the editorial line rather than openly scrutinising the Conservative administration. In this sense, the political economy of the media plays a big role in determining what items should be initiated and how they should be framed. Conversely, the local newspapers have the topic of the North-South divide at their hearts and focus upon regional inequalities. *MEN* and *LE* both draw upon deviant voices that do not agree with the government line. These voices mainly manifest themselves in articles that deal with the country as a whole, rather than with local problems that have resulted from a North-South divide. Despite the centralisation of printing and regional news, then, the editors of *MEN* and *LE* do not merely reproduce official stories, but include moral and political evaluations in news items. In doing so, the media exert a certain amount of influence upon public opinion

and, ultimately, political decision making (Kuypers 5). Whereas *MEN* and *LE* serve northern audiences and subsequently support the ‘northern cause’, *DT* and *TT* have less affinity with affairs that benefit or disfavour the north.

This study has made clear that the North-South divide is not easy to pinpoint: while some politicians and media outlets ignore its existence altogether, other groups advocate regional policies that diminish inequalities between north and south. The question remains, then, is whether the imbalance between the regions is well-grounded or merely a social construction. Is there a basis for different understandings, as this dissertation suggests? Official reports have suggested there is; the Office for National Statistics, for example, revealed the existence of an income gap (Stewart 1), whilst another report highlighted a gap in life expectancy (Meikle 1). Yet, if the government continues to downplay the divide, prospects for the gap to close look bleak. One thing is certain: the North-South divide has played a big role in the past and will continue to shape the present and future. Yet, it certainly is not all “doom and gloom”: it is so deeply embedded in the national consciousness, it has led to a unique cultural richness and diversity in England.

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