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**RESEARCHING THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC
OF KOREA: A SURVEY ON KNOWLEDGE GAPS**

Bachelor's thesis

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I declare I have written the bachelor's thesis independently.

All works and major viewpoints of the other authors, data from other sources of literature and elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

The length of this thesis from introduction to analysis and conclusions is 12,633 words.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	4
INTRODUCTION	5
1. DEFINING EXISTING CONCEPTS	7
1.1. Arms and capability of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.....	7
1.2. Stance of key foreign states towards Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.....	9
1.3. Discussion of rationality in academic literature	15
1.4. Foreign policy of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.....	17
1.5. Oppression of people in Democratic People’s Republic of Korea	18
1.6. Markets and economy of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea.....	19
1.7. Model	21
2. FINDING GAPS THROUGH APPLYING CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE	23
2.1. Biased narrative	23
2.2. Identities of states	26
2.2.1. Lebow and national identifications	26
2.2.2. Identification conflicts of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea	28
3. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS.....	32
LIST OF REFERENCES	36

ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to fill gaps in existing knowledge on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) within a broad multi-disciplinary field of Korean studies. The thesis claims that, in general, academics have failed to grasp a complete picture about the DPRK, thus also failing to explain the nature of tensions in the area and what makes it difficult to unravel.

Framework wise, a constructivism-bound approach is applied to summarise current knowledge on the topic in order to single out a number of missing points, which can be valid for the whole debate. The findings of this research indicate the definite lack of critical thinking that exists in the field, pushing towards a range of particular one-sided narratives and ignoring the DPRK as a special case in the identifications' construction process.

Keywords: critical thinking, biased narrative, state identifications' formation, political psychology, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the United States of America, the Republic of Korea.

INTRODUCTION

The North Korea-related problem has several different angles. For example, it can be approached from a policy-maker's point of view (usually, on how to find a way to influence the state). Leif-Eric Easley (2017), for example, considers various policy options on the table for the United States of America (USA), the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the new context of Trump's strategic uncertainty and Seoul's newly formed cooperation-prone administration.

In addition to academia, these issues can also be tackled by practitioners working on the field of humanitarian aid, who take one step further and implement 'helping' strategies where the greatest need is seen. Providing food and medical help is one of the most common ways to do so. In the period from 1995 until 2011, the USA alone provided the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) with over 2 million metric tons of food aid and medical supplies worth over USD 10 million (Manyin and Nikitin 2014, 2). Internationally, the message is framed up via upholding fundamental dignity and human rights, which is a universal mission, as noted Michael Kirby (2016), Chairman of the United Nations Committee of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In journalism, there is a distinct search for a topic that usually unites 'war', 'North Korea', 'threat', and 'nuclear' into one powerful headline. For example, a *Newsweek* issue announces, 'North Korea threat: nuclear war may be 'a tiny tantrum away' Nobel Peace Prize-winner warns' (Sinclair 2017) or *Daily Express* puts it in a similar way by publishing a material titled 'North Korea warning: Kim's 'real' nuclear war is a threat to survival of the entire planet' (Morris 2018). Such materials tend to disproportionately emphasize certain facts making it difficult to see the whole picture. In classic history, it is fascinating to rewind the last 50 years backwards to discover that the post-Korean War northern part of the peninsula was on the rise and that it was *their* strategic narrative on saving the economically struggling southern part of the nation (Lankov 2013, 70).

Nowadays, the southern half of the Korean peninsula is considered one of the world's most developed and globally inter-linked prosperous states, thus the DPRK is perceived to be threat not

solely to East Asian region but the whole international community. Debates on how to effectively minimise that threat continue. For example, Roy (2017) suggests that there are four fundamental misconceptions often made that lead to consideration of options that in reality are not 'on the table'. A similar note is made by Pollack (2017), who starts his presentation in a high-profile discussion panel on North Korea-related issues with a conception, that the starting point for understanding North Korea is typically the wrong one and pushes researchers to make false conclusions. The latter basket of opinions suggests, there are pieces of the 'North Korean puzzle' that are overlooked and those gaps in knowledge make it difficult to fully comprehend this conundrum in its entire complexity.

Arguably, from the academic perspective, there is inefficient research in grasping the comprehensive academic picture of the DPRK to draw firm conclusions on a better range of practices to utilize when interacting with that state. **In general, studies on the DPRK fail in grasping a complete picture that would explain the nature of tensions within the North Korean issue and what makes it difficult to unravel.** Accordingly, this work intends to add some value by presenting a survey of existing academic knowledge on the DPRK, while aiming to find gaps in understanding that many schools of thought in the field of political science miss. To be more exact, constructivism-bound approach was applied to frame up current knowledge to determine which missing connections in North Korean studies can be singled out. In order to reach this goal, the following two research questions were established: 1) what are the main clusters of contemporary academic analysis on the DPRK in details?; and 2) looking through the prism of constructivism, which dimensions have been missed or neglected in existing clusters of analysis on the subject so far?

The first question will use the methods of discourse analysis and modelling. Answers will be found through literature review of peer reviewed articles and determine areas in North Korean studies that get the most attention and which ways ideas in those areas are developed. In result of analysing outcomes of the first question, common themes will be presented in form of a model. Second question will be tackled by means of critical analysis of existing narrative and analysis of identifications, building on and benefiting from a framework proposed by Lebow (2016) in his *National Identities and International Relations*.

1. DEFINING EXISTING CONCEPTS

Even though the DPRK as an object of study has been researched from various different angles, from congenital disorders in the DPRK to dollarization of the DPRK, international affairs often come across certain overlapping topics when discussing this subject. In order to find out main clusters of academic discussions on the DPRK, peer reviewed articles available at research database EBSCOhost, which responded to a search on the keywords ‘North Korea’, were categorized into various topics, including the International Relations (IR)-related one. In addition, the search was limited to the materials in English, published in the period from 2016 until 2018, where full text would be accessed. Significantly, the search took place on 26 January 2018 and resulted in 169 articles found. After the planned content-based categorization was performed, 9 articles were considered relevant to the field of IR, and through comprehensive literature review of these articles, the following topics most often discussed in the IR context were detected: arms and capability, foreign stance, rationality, foreign policy of the DPRK, oppression and markets. The next sub-chapters will present overview of the found views.

1.1. Arms and capability of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

Both nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction represent a combined classic problem in current international environment. **Nuclear capacity of the DPRK** is a reoccurring topic one can find in addition to media materials in numerous academic works dealing with affairs of the DPRK. A primary concern when it comes to nuclear capabilities is the obvious threat it poses. Naturally, perceived threat combines facts and fears in apprehending it. Something familiar often seems less dangerous and comfort usually gives a sense of security. The DPRK’s case is on the opposite side—showing outsiders only a fraction of how they live, and fear of damage nuclear strike might bring with it growing with continuing nuclear and missile tests. Combining lack of insight on the DPRK and fear of damage, perceived threat is prominent concept associated with this state. Joo (2014, 24) notes two schools of thought emerging, one of which is armament-

dominance theory (nuclearization is implemented for security reasons) which can be countered only with tough stance, and bargaining-priority theory (nuclearization is achieved in order to leverage out of sanctions) which can be countered with negotiations. There also seems to be a few who argue for national pride aspect of nuclearization.

Studies in the field shed light on importance of nuclear weapons for the regime and help understand, where this issue is rooted. The ability of processing nuclear capacity is important for the DPRK for number of reasons, first of them being **preservation of regime**. Wallace (2014, 149) argues that intention of the DPRK is by no means to start another Korean War, but retain their sovereignty, with which the international community agreed back in the 1990s. Additionally, in order to deter an external threat, the North Korean state needs to make up for its military weakness with nuclear arsenal (S. Park 2016; Roy 2017). Since much of its military equipment can be considered obsolete due to lack of connections to upgrade it, alternative route of creating mass destruction weapon is taken. It gives the assurance there is a ‘plan B’ at all times, which plays affirmative role in this world of theirs, where this communist regime is the mere survivor. Schattle (2017, 3) believes that the absence of peace treaty is perceived as a threat by the DPRK, which makes them compulsively invest in expensive projects like nuclear program instead of redirecting these resources elsewhere. Nuclear weapon is the single leverage they can use to protect regime. For example, as Schattle (Ibid.) and McMillan (2017, 4) put it, nuclear program is the regime’s insurance policy—because nobody ‘nukes’ a country with ‘nukes’. D. Park (2016, 76) guesses unless the DPRK is pressured with anything beyond sanctions, it is unlikely for them to consider suspension of nuclear program.

Next to functionality of keeping the regime protected, these capabilities have also a more abstract purpose. Nuclear capability is an integral element of **national pride** for the DPRK. It demonstrates the capability of state to provide protection to its people, which simultaneously legitimizes those in charge. Roy (2017, 3) points out that such a considerable success is important especially in this society where regime has failed for a long time to bring about promised prosperity. However, it is not clear, as discussed by McMillan (2017, 4), whether this constitutes a success for people, since they are the ones who bare the weight of privation that is the cost for belonging to the exclusive nuclear club. Having a sense of national pride is great, but one cannot fight their biological needs for food and other essentials for living. Therefore, even if it is hard to detect, there is a possibility national pride of having nuclear capabilities does not expand further from elite. Despite that, denuclearization, as Roy (2017, 3) contends, would show as a sign of weakness to the nation as

nuclear equipment is displayed at every chance. It is a blow that leadership of the country is not ready to take.

There is another reason that contradicts denuclearization from point of view of the DPRK. In addition to two previous goals, **building leverage** can be considered as third important reason for the wish to acquire sizeable nuclear arsenal. Both Roy (2017, 3) and Schattle (2017, 3) agree on the DPRK's capabilities acting as their trump card. Drawing on sequence of sanctions that have been imposed to the DPRK, they are losing partners with whom they could make deals through negotiation and therefore must at this point in time explore alternative routes of creating strategies to be able to bargain with other counterparts. This trump might be used for leveraging on long-term goal of unification of peninsula on the DPRK's terms (S. Park 2016; Roy 2017). Even if the regime does not have alternative tools to bargain with, nuclear arsenal is enough to do the job. In a colloquial way, trump in a card game helps to win a weak hand—that is why it is called a trump. In addition, an advantage of having nuclear weapons as a trump is that certain amount of effort goes a long way. Having a hundred missiles that can carry nuclear bomb instead of a single one does not heighten the leverage a hundred times. Having a few nuclear weapons is enough to use it as a powerful bargaining chip. Consequently, the nuclear capability the DPRK has been able to develop so far is useful for them in many ways, which makes it highly unlikely for them to give up on it on any conditions.

1.2. Stance of key foreign states towards Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Several barterers have been speculated to be appealing to the DPRK in exchange for denuclearization. This hypothetical exchange, which some experts argue about, frequently involve **economic help and humanitarian aid**. Schattle (2017, 6) speculates economic aid which helps economic development and contributes to public health objectives would be something the DPRK is willing to sacrifice for. He additionally discusses that at a later stage of denuclearization process suspension of THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) system could also be discussed. Easley (2017, 24) similarly believes humanitarian aid could be part of negotiation process but adds that additional economic benefits would require further improvements on the DPRK's security policy. Schattle (2017, 4) additionally suggest scaling down joint military exercises of the ROK and the USA. On the contrary, Kightley (2016, 181) points out that right-wing politicians have

shown disapproval of millions of dollars of money flow which has already reached the DPRK as aid from the ROK, and they suggest it has only helped strengthen current regime. It is yet to be confirmed, if there is anything at all that the DPRK finds to be well traded. There is a chance the right currency has not been deemed yet, especially considering, as Joo (2014, 26) brings out, denuclearization of the DPRK is allegedly associated with the dying wish of the Supreme Leader Kim Il Sung.

In order to find out, parties need to have diplomatic environment to reach any conclusions, or at least have the possibility to exchange ideas in diplomatic environment. It seems like **there is an agreement between scholars in the field** that negotiations are the key to solving the problem at hand, however, possibility and terms of such happening are considered in various directions (Schattle 2017, 2). D. Park (2016, 76) states that all multilateral negotiations with the DPRK have stopped for the time being and bilateral talks with the USA seem almost impossible. Recent events on the contrary show that such talks are not out of reach as President Trump and Supreme Leader Kim have set to meet current year (*BBC News* 2018). Considering the approach of executing negotiations, Easley (2017, 24-25) warns states to consider talks as a test to the DPRK and if concrete steps of action are not set, pressure should not be reduced. In this context, Geimer (2017, 86) inversely argues starting point of negotiations must be free of preconditions, meaning, all parties should be able to bring out not what they want but what they are willing to give up in order to reach a compromise. He also emphasises importance of accommodating wishes of Koreans in the process this time—all Koreans. Despite the fact that engaging with the DPRK may have its downsides, Joo (2014, 33) argues, it has been the only way to produce any meaningful results in terms of denuclearization of the DPRK thus far.

Process of negotiation is further complicated by trust issues involved states have mutually. Ahn (2013, 27) suggests there is **deep distrust** between each other which in some cases even poses threats. Schattle (2017, 4-5) reasons that the DPRK is so to say a ‘textbook example’ of rogue state involved in everything starting from drug smuggling and money laundering to human-rights atrocities and assassinations, which suggests even if they were to put cap on their nuclear and missile program, they would presumably consider selling remaining weapons to terrorist groups. Because the DPRK is quite decisively going down the rogue road, there will always be the question of how we know to trust them. Schattle (*Ibid.*) suggests, therefore, incremental steps to denuclearization are needed because each of those steps would act as a test to strengthen credibility of the DPRK. On the other hand, the DPRK also has basis to not believe in commitment of the USA, as D. Park (2016, 79) brings out, in light of fact that when the Six Party Talks were still

engaged in, the PRC and others sent high-ranking officials such as vice foreign minister to high-profile meetings while the USA sent an assistant secretary of state, which shows weaker commitment to addressing nuclear problem. Looking elsewhere on the world stage, the brutal breach of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on the Ukrainian nuclear arsenal does not encourage the DPRK to make any agreements regarding their much-valued nuclear capacities either, making them ask, how do we know the USA would not break denuclearization agreement. As a result, it is difficult for both parties to trust each other enough to reach bilateral arrangements. It takes effort for all parties to prove their interest in trust-building and solving the problem.

The USA's view point towards nuclear problem further complicates discussions between two. Stance of the USA has been the same for a lengthy period as previous attempts of persuading the DPRK to drop nuclear program have shown to be ineffective. Arguably, the United States has clearly stated its attitude of **not tolerating** nuclear DPRK. Easley (2017, 12) notes that President Trump has announced never accepting anything less than full denuclearization. Moreover, along with that the president has expressed denuclearization of peninsula to be their only goal and not regime change (Ibid.). Schattle (2017, 4), however, argues that despite claims of the USA, in near term they would have to be content with cap on nuclear capabilities and a moratorium, opinion also voiced by former President Obama. Schattle (Ibid.) additionally brings out the irony that even though Trump is not the first president to claim so and the USA has had the same stance of total denuclearization of the DPRK since its first test in 2006, in fact the USA has tolerated nuclear-armed the DPRK by this point in time for over a decade. Actions speak louder than words, which leaves one wondering how serious the USA in effect is about their policy regarding the DPRK.

The USA, a key structural element of the current international system, has a big part to play in influencing the DPRK. With change of key personalities in the White House, policy towards the DPRK drastically changes as well. The Obama's 'strategic patience' may have had noble intentions but, as Joo (2014,33) notes, it ended up merely waiting the DPRK to denuclearize and ultimately ignoring the problem. With the new presidential administration, a new strategy has been adopted by the USA and a **complete opposite** to previous one at that. While Obama's term at the White House was marked with 'strategic patience', current President Trump has adopted a strategy of 'maximum pressure', which includes expressing bold opinions about the DPRK freely through social media. The USA is not planning to stand by about the situation on the Korean peninsula. McMillan (2017, 3) brings an example associated with the former Secretary of State Tillerson who said that every option is on the table regarding this issue, which is a view that similarly State department has voiced. Both Trump and Tillerson were lobbying for stronger sanctions for the

DPRK, as Easley (2017, 10) points out. Furthermore, Easley (Ibid.) points to an example of cooperation project of the ROK and the USA to bring to life Korea mission centre established by the CIA, which is first such establishment with the intention to focus solely on one state. In addition to pressuring the DPRK on diverse levels, the USA has also started using pressure tactics on the PRC, as the USA believes them to be the key into solving the problem. Trump would, as noted by Easley (2017, 14), handle problem on the peninsula even without the involvement of the PRC, implying Beijing better choose a side that serves their interests before it is too late. Considering previous, there are several insights brought out which confirm Trump's new strategy and its seriousness.

On the other hand, there are opposite views. **Some scholars are doubtful of credibility of 'maximum pressure'**. Schattle (2017, 2) suggests it is not clear that in case of renaming the problem, it would lead to any actual change, not to mention improvements. It would need substantive policy revision from either Washington or Pyongyang in order for anything significant to arise, he explains. McMillan (2017, 3) positions a similar thought, saying that other than deploying THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defence) system, Tillerson left the impression of having merely a stance, rather than policy, towards the DPRK as no concrete steps of 'maximum pressure' were pointed out. He also discusses that military option will be entertained by the USA but more as a game than actual strategy (2017, 4). Easley (2017, 24) adds from the perspective of the ROK that Trump and Moon may find their common ground on 'pressure now, engage later' approach, however, as of this point in time, conditions and action plan is not coordinated. Additionally, rational calculation shows that military strike on the DPRK will catalyse them to target Seoul (which is the only valuable card they in fact currently have), as Roy (2017, 5) discusses, which would end in massive destruction, therefore, defeating the point of strike in the name of denuclearization. This imaginary strike which Washington has considered as actual option, to fight proliferation, raises the debate similar to War on Terror—is it justified (Cumings quoted in J. Kim 2016, 135)? This all depicts the USA with a clear goal in mind without in effect having a vision how to get there. In other words, 'maximum pressure' might turn out as aggressive façade without being anything more substantial.

The other key player in this situation is said to be the People's Republic of China (PRC). Although the USA tends to count on the PRC extensively in resolving the issue, many scholars highlight the **PRC's priorities are simply different** because of the negative influences the DPRK's collapse would have for the PRC. Priority of the USA and its allies is dealing with nuclear threat it constitutes, while main concern of the PRC is to reduce the risk of the DPRK's economic collapse

(D. Park 2016; J. Park 2016). For this reason, Chinese have invoked humanitarian aid to the DPRK to prevent causing deprivation among North Koreans, McMillan (2017, 4) claims. Many experts in the field claim the reason for avoiding the regime's collapse to be potential refugee crisis that would affect Chinese economy and cause heavy *koreanization* in parts of the PRC (McMillan 2017; D. Park 2016; Roy 2017). Arguably, the DPRK also acts as buffer zone between having US military bases too close to Chinese border (McMillan 2017; Roy 2017). McMillan (2017, 4) additionally brings out the reason that the PRC may want to maintain its image of not interfering in other's affairs. Roy (2017, 6) points out that in case of unification, stronger united Korea might have negative influence on the PRC and, the PRC additionally worries about what would happen to nuclear arms when power vacuum forms. J. Park (2016, 26) brings out the PRC benefiting from current monopolization of the DPRK's market and getting natural resources from the DPRK. From the Chinese scholarly side, Zhang (2016, 72) discusses potential bad influence of turbulence on the peninsula to disturb Chinese pursuit of modernization and expanding its global influence. The PRC has many reasons to relax sanctions or ease tensions others try to imply on the DPRK. This, however, leaves the DPRK with an opportunity to use the situation for their own advantage.

Even if there are numerous reasons for the PRC to work against pressuring the DPRK, several researchers have found the PRC to still be a key player. Some scholars believe that because of **dependence of the PRC on the DPRK** they are the best chance at solving this problem. D. Park (2016, 78) notes that many experts not only believe the PRC to be the best option but the only option to influence the DPRK. Easley (2017, 14) considers involvement of the PRC in the process natural since they have long been the ones shielding Kim's regime and are responsible for up to 85% of the DPRK's external trade. Roy (2017, 5) adds to economic aspect with claiming that the PRC is main trading partner of the DPRK, also main source for food and fuel. Therefore, since the DPRK is heavily dependent on the PRC, Easley (2017, 13) proposes secondary sanctions on Chinese entities doing business with the DPRK could be an option. The PRC has taken some steps to express their discontent, though negotiation remains as preferred way of impact, Easley (2017, 14) states. Additionally, in spite of the PRC having the power to influence, their priorities withdraw them from using that power, ultimately playing into hands of the DPRK.

Recent events show the PRC has tried to use milder version of power instead of going straight to cutting economic ties, though **the role of the PRC** in the DPRK equation **remains unclear**. The PRC's reluctant attitude to sanctions has allowed trade through land border with the PRC to continue, which among everything else further feeds the nuclear program of the DPRK via dual use technology (Easley 2017; D. Park 2016). Zhang (2016, 72-73) claims that 2016 was the first

year when the PRC voted in support of UN resolution sanctioning the DPRK. He also discusses that Chinese officials and media have expressed their annoyance at the DPRK, however, the DPRK appears not to be bothered by it. Roy (2017, 6) notes that the DPRK has not stopped launching missiles even when the PRC has publicly opposed it. Zhang (2016, 77) adds that tension is apparent also in official media of the DPRK, which portrays hostile attitude towards the PRC who agreed to sanctions. D. Park (2016, 79) believes that because of lack of cooperation by the PRC, Chinese role in the equation should be challenged.

The PRC's real and perceived role is not the only factor of the North Korean 'play' that could be revised. There are numerous opinions on what one could do to influence the situation on the peninsula. D. Park (2016, 78) has raised the question of familiarity within the context of deterrence—he explains that, in the 1990s, military option was on the table for the USA, and the DPRK understood the threat, whereas even if joint military exercises are still provocative, they are no longer effectively used together with diplomatic manoeuvres to advance the process further. They have lost the value of pressure and effectiveness to be used as a tool. The same can be argued about Trump's expression of hostile stance over social media—used excessively makes it rather lacking sense of judgement than a clever strategy. Roy (2017, 7) offers solution to be a reminder to the DPRK that any aggression from their side will end up with Seoul-led joint government. J. Kim (2016, 139) argues the best option to make the tyranny of the state less harsh. Easley (2017, 13) speculates over the idea of increased supervision on human rights and attention to targeted humanitarian aid, which would take pressure off Korean people and place it on regime. Schattle (2017,6) has contrary opinion opposite of deterrence and maintains that many analysts have concluded the best anybody can do is just preparing for contingencies, like regime collapse or outbreak of conflict, and expect the unexpected without intervening in the process while simply responding to whatever may come. However, this raises the question—is it not exactly what 'strategic patience' was trying to achieve? Yet it is widely criticized. Whichever way is chosen, Geimer (2017, 90-91) maintains, the USA has special responsibility to clear make up for past errors as they created the two countries and led way to events which ignored Korean people and cost an unnecessary war.

1.3. Discussion of rationality in academic literature

Something not often discussed when talking about international affairs is categorizing actors into different mental states. It is, however, the case with addressing the DPRK recently as its rationality has become a factor when assessing problems related to Korean peninsula. Several experts address **the issue of misunderstanding the DPRK as irrational player**—it is often referred to in media and by most powerful players on international arena. This view of irrationality might have formed because of the DPRK taking seemingly big risks with testing missiles or nuclear matters and allocating disproportionately large amount of resources into developing it. Irrationality, though, is acting without reason or like Roy (2017, 2) puts it—on temporary emotion or interchanging goals for one another in a brief period of time, putting one matter first one day and another one another day. The DPRK demonstrates their boldness through risky decisions and consistency by going all in to achieve a goal, but nothing that matches with definition of irrationality. McMillan (2017, 4) elucidates that leaders of the DPRK constantly act towards survival of their rule which means sacrificing alternative goals for this one—opposite of irrational behaviour. He elaborates that the DPRK might be afraid of regime change as happened with Iraq pursued by the USA in an ill-advised way, which makes the DPRK to guard it so dearly. J. Kim (2016, 132-133) adds that considering the DPRK as a relic of an era long gone, it is doing remarkable job of upholding itself, skilfully manipulating with key states instead of being manipulated, and has become centre of security issues even for the USA which no irrational state could achieve. Kim Jong Un might have delusional ideas about his role on international stage, but these cannot be confused with how he runs the country. Both Roy (2017, 2) and McMillan (2017, 4) agree on the point that people mix up the terms—the fact that the DPRK is simply evil or may have atrocious values does not make them irrational. They are willing to take large risks because they do not see any other way (Lankov quoted in J. Kim 2016, 132).

While academics do not consider the DPRK irrational, this does not mean leaders of the state dislike this image. Whether it is intentionally designed or merely making the most of the situation, **the DPRK is using this irrationality image as their leverage**. Easley (2017, 24) points out that Kim regime might have got used to the ‘madman image’ and discovered ways to use it in their favour. Adopting this image of unpredictability gives a chance to portray oneself as easily irritable, hence deterring opponent from acting against them. In one phrase, this is described as ‘madman theory’ said to be created by President Nixon, which is likewise used by the current U.S. president. Learning from Nixon’s experiences, such a ‘madman’ approach on international arena

controversially creates more instability and threat, especially when there are two opponents involved with same façade. However, one cannot be blamed for using this image in their advantage in the circumstance of having been labelled as ‘mad’ anyway. The DPRK turns every disadvantage they find into something they can use beneficially, which can divergently be called highly rational.

A certain degree of irrationality can also reflect in being unreasonably cautious on the expense of nations’ lives. This notion, which Obama has described as the DPRK’s paranoia, can be understood via looking back in time. The DPRK’s **historic memories** make them extra alert to threat and put regime security first. This nation was a whole for a long time; that said, the peninsula has suffered significantly in recent times. The Korean people’s roots are traced back from 4,000 years ago, and in the latest period of 100 years, as Zhang (2016, 72) highlights, they have been under colonization, endured invasion and artificial division. This leaves a mark in collective mind of nation, including leaders of it. Let it be considered, that the DPRK does a superb job, leaving aside morality and validity of it, not letting people forget what is important for them as a nation. Same goes for having strong resistance against the USA, it goes much further than just a paranoia. Roy (2017, 2-3) brings an example from Korean War when US aircraft dropped more ordnance on northern part of peninsula than they did the entire Pacific theatre of World War II. When running out of urban areas to bomb, dams were targeted to ruin rice supply. It takes time to heal wounds, which the DPRK is not ready to do yet. These are the memories, which make them feel despise against Americans. It might be called paranoia in light of fact that decades have passed since. Concurrently, the intention of the USA was dualistic, therefore it is to some extent understandable from point of the DPRK. Inhumane memories make them put national security first and albeit it is coming from expense of nation’s comfort, without state there would not be the nation either. Geimer (2017, 87) compares Korean War situation to the one in Iraq and Afghanistan—the USA creates a mess involving great deal of casualties and then seeks further involvement in name of cleaning up the mess. History might not repeat itself. Meanwhile, it is a firm place to look for cause-effect associations.

Considering history of the USA, labelling the DPRK the one to be irrational, ensuring protection of their state, seems comical. While head of U.S. Pacific Command has claimed that the USA is aiming to bring Kim Jong Un to his senses rather than to his knees (Easley 2017, 129), the USA itself, leaving aside major events like the British forces burning Washington in 1814, Pearl Harbor in 1941, the 9/11 and internal struggles, has been remarkably well protected but yet feels the need to have a vast structure of agencies looking after the security of their homeland (Engelhardt 2015). Additionally, when it comes to strategies and goals pursued, the strategy switch of 180 degrees between two presidents may leave the impression of the USA being irrational.

1.4. Foreign policy of Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Throughout different rulers of the state, the DPRK has had many strategies through which they communicate with other states. Many of these strategies, though, tend to fall on to an aggressive side of execution. More often than not, the DPRK uses **rather extreme foreign policy tools**. These tools frequently include violence or hostility of some kind. McMillan (2017, 2) points to an example of sinking the South Korean Navy's corvette *Cheonan*, which assured that the DPRK is willing to go to extreme lengths with their risky policies in case they are able to escape consequences. Easley (2017, 11) highlights a complementing example of hostages taken by the DPRK in several cases to get the chance to meet high-profile Americans. The nuclear program may be merely another bargaining chip just as hostages were once. All the warnings issued by the DPRK and provocative actions along with them, D. Park (2016, 78) adds, may be a grand orchestrated negation strategy in the DPRK's style. The DPRK has also been noted to be using soft power decades ago as their foreign policy tool. Kightley (2016, 180) describes the 'charm campaign' created by Kim Jong Il which was successful in establishing several economic relations and organizing high-profile summits with neighbouring states. She additionally mentions it in fact acting as façade to mask foreign aid received from 'enemy' states leaving the impression to their own nation that they were the ones attracting this generosity. For one reason or another the DPRK has reverted to using coercive tools to achieve their goals.

Even though foreign policy tools are often risky, there is little ground to believe that a bigger scale destruction is a move they would take because it would backfire immensely. As foreign policy of the DPRK is mostly driven on **the goal of regime survival**, presumably they know that any strike by them is not really an option. Roy (2017, 7) mentions that the DPRK as a rational actor must understand that any strike of theirs will be responded to with a counter attack which will end in their own destruction. In case of the DPRK being the first aggressor, there is nothing holding others back any more in name of defence. Therefore, their nuclear arsenal acts well as deterrent due to its power of destruction, but it can be doubted the DPRK has intention to use it since self-destruction is certainly not what they are trying to achieve as a state. The paradox is, having nuclear arsenal is what makes them a target for the USA in the first place (J. Kim 2016, 135-136).

1.5. Oppression of people in Democratic People's Republic of Korea

A mixture of totalitarianism, communism and monarchy—the DPRK's political regime represents, to an extent, a unique system with many peculiarities. An ideology built on lies has served its purpose of unifying minds and surrendering people to authority without asking too many questions, however this makes it **harder and harder to survive as a state on world stage**. As Schattle (2017, 5) points out, regimes survival is built on constant deceiving people into thinking they need the state to protect. As Joo (2014, 26) has concluded analysing official news of the DPRK, nation sees the DPRK more as threatened than threatening. It is a bold move, however not new. Hitler was the first one to write down that if lie told is big enough and told frequently enough, it becomes the truth. This is why, as Kightley (2016, 186) states, dictator's priority is preventing changes in the people's mindset rather than increasing state income or attending to impoverished nation. Wallace (2014, 148) elaborates that unifying against a culprit directs attention away from internal struggles. Using this propaganda technique in a globalized world is becoming continuously harder, yet the DPRK, not willing to let go of making the communist dream work, is carrying on with deceiving practices as they grow more apparent and continuously restricting.

Oppression is a common tool of maintaining the system for totalitarianism and the DPRK is no exception to that. Oppression in general has various sides, like unjust punishments, hidden network of informants, control of media, politics and military. Regarding the DPRK, however, control on gaining new information is most frequently discussed. Contact with the outside is strictly under control in **a fear of change**. Regime keeps critical thinking down as much as possible in order to conceal the lies that have been told during ideology building. Kightley (2016, 185) believes that is why the DPRK has not taken up the Chinese path because it would need larger amount of opening the society than they are willing to do. It would mean people find out that the southern half of peninsula does not need saving. She points out that this was also a major disadvantage of Kaesong Industrial Complex for the DPRK for the reason that people working side by side have contact in some form, which cannot be supervised at all times (Ibid.). In a rapidly globalizing world, it is difficult to maintain this information barrier as key to success is often being interconnected. J. Kim (2016, 136) argues, even though leadership is reluctant to foreign aid, they know in long term they would have to expand foreign trade to stay afloat. The DPRK is still trying to, as long as they can, stay alive best they can because regime stability depends on it. Dukalskis (2016, 54) finds through his survey that viewing of South Korean media changed the attitude of North Koreans about the ROK but did not change their perception of homeland. Lankov, paraphrased in J. Kim (2016, 138),

nevertheless argues that the DPRK's ruling dynasty is destined a hard landing (e.g. by transition to Chinese system) or extended survival followed by even harder landing (by not keeping up with interconnected world).

Limiting freedoms in every way possible can be considered a catalyst for deciding to leave the regime, even if the stakes are high. Remarkably, oppression **might not be the main reason** for North Korean defectors to leave their country. Kightley (2016, 185) explains that majority of defectors do not flee because of political opposition but poor economic conditions. Just as survival is primary goal of the regime, primary physiological need for humans is also survival and when malnourished body weakens, human being naturally will try to find a way out of this situation. Therefore, it is not surprising main reason for defecting to be survival in light of fact that it is a need that cannot be ignored. However, Kightley also mentions that most of these defectors fleeing from economic conditions are middle-aged women who are least supervised, which can be the cause of such statistics—more often than not defectors escape due to economic conditions because these are the people, who were actually able to defect in the first place. Therefore, it cannot be argued with a certain level of assurance that oppression is not pressuring people enough to defect. Internal surveillance determines opportunities to defect to be more in favour for some than others.

1.6. Markets and economy of Democratic People's Republic of Korea

The theme of survival cannot be tied solely to defection because it additionally plays a role in rise of private economy. The **need for survival** has helped shadow economy to grow in the DPRK. During a famine in the 1990s, when state was not able to provide as it had promised, other ways of survival had to be found. Dukalskis (2016, 494) refers to statistics gathered by Haggard & Noland (2011, 7) where they state that for 35% of people shadow market is the only source for food and over 60% depend mostly on markets for their food. Leaving aside the slightly more privileged capital, which has been designed to act as a façade, Roy (2017, 4) states that 90% of population relies either on shadow market or foreign aid in satisfying their biological needs. Shadow market was, and has been since the 1990s, the source of food and income for people. For state's misfortune, fighting millions of people who are trying to survive was not sensible, which let markets flourish further (Dukalskis 2016, 498). The same expert elaborates, again drawing on Haggard & Noland (2010, 136-38), more than two-thirds of population have been involved in shadow market trading, and many households earn money from private business activities. About

three decades later, market activities have reached further than merely surviving, and new middle-class has noted to emerge.

Several researchers have discovered that the key to regime change in the DPRK would take place only if there are enough people to carry differing ideas. Inversely it has been concluded that **societal change is not likely to occur** due to a semi-legal market activity. This type of change would occur if enough people experienced drastic shift of mindset. Moreover, even though business is the most likely place for people to be exposed to foreign ideas and sole existence of this shadow economy affirms that state is not the single provider, Dukalskis (2016) believes the best it will do is creating cynicism among people but not opposition like it is predicted in some literature. He concludes there seems to be too much state control and too little opposition for such transformation to appear. Furthermore, Svobik (2012, 3-5) paraphrased in Dukalskis (2016, 504) argues that based on cross-national analysis dictators are usually removed by elite and not by uprising from below. This gives additional reasons to believe that shadow market is not the catalyst for change in that society.

Shadow markets began to emerge during famine to help people meet ends, but since then it has been growing and human weakness of greed helps it spread further. The country's **shadow economy** seems to be able to exist due to widespread bribery. Kightley (2016, 180) and Dukalskis (2016, 498-499) both confirm bribery in the DPRK is so widely accepted that economic activity extends beyond what is officially accepted. This enables to step over laws and submerge in various market activities by paying off officials. Dukalskis (2016, 494-495) also brings examples when bribery can have appearance of officialdom, which is exemplified by private food services that operate in technically state-owned restaurants or production activities when shadow market operators collude with enterprise managers in order to use equipment of state factories for their own manufacturing process. He adds that once it was hard to operate business across province borders, but even that has become extremely easy through bribery. This makes the spread of shadow economy easier and the more widespread bribery becomes, the more it will keep growing. Dukalskis (2016, 495) citing Joo illustrates shadow economy with a North Korean saying that 'everything except a cat's horn' can be found on their shadow market. In respect of this paper, it shows how easy it is markets, and critical thinking along with it, to spread.

1.7. Model

There is comprehensive discussion found in the academic literature about the DPRK, which roughly falls into six categories (see *Figure 1*). Arms and nuclear capability of DPRK is discussed from the points of its reasons, consequences and international pressure. This is also the topic that, together with discussions on markets and economy, has most overlapping areas with other topics. Stance of key foreign states is the topic discussed most comprehensively in literature that concerns IR. The USA and the PRC as key actors are most often considered as well as several ways of influencing the DPRK. Rationality of leaders of the DPRK is mostly disputed by scholars, however argued to be used as leverage by DPRK itself. Foreign policy of the DPRK is claimed to be rather extreme, which they use for leverage building. Oppression is a topic that associates strongly with society of the DPRK, mostly discussed on the context of usage of it as a tool and how it can possibly affect North Korean development. Finally, markets and economy of the DPRK are discussed with main emphasis on economic ties with the PRC and shadow economy's growth.

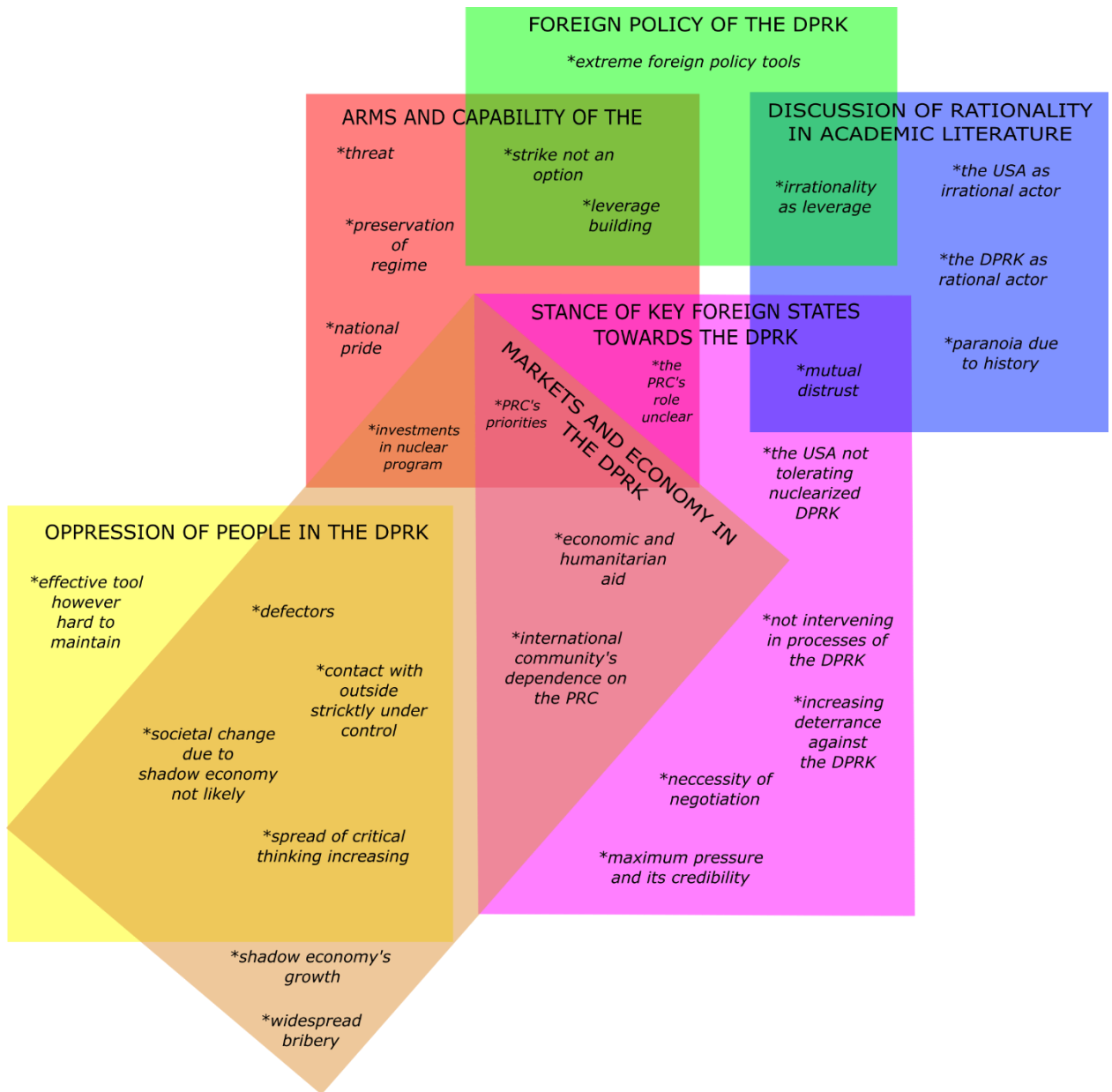


Figure 1. Topics of discussion on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in academic literature

Source: Completed by author

2. FINDING GAPS THROUGH APPLYING CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

Within the wide range of opinions and arguments, it can be complicated to understand what is still missing from complete picture to comprehend the DPRK. Analysing the previous, author has discovered there to be two vast gaps that, when filled, could help create larger understanding of the DPRK's standing on the international stage. The first gap considers a perspective from which the affairs of the DPRK are handled, discussing ignorance of biased narrative and its consequences. The second gap constitutes in uniqueness of the case of the DPRK and deals with importance of analysis through identity in IR. Constructivism, emphasizing consciousness and human awareness, is appropriate tool for analysing results of shared understandings and narrative construction. As constructivism also regards identity exploration as essential part of it, constructivist framework has been used to analyse the identifications' formation of the DPRK. More specifically, Richard Ned Lebow's approach to constructivism has been used to build upon. His concept considers social interactions at the state level, uses a unique approach to identities and theorizes how these findings help to shed light on international cooperation.

2.1. Biased narrative

The picture seen about the DPRK has formed into a one-sided narrative, which serves the interest of particular viewpoint. This narrative discussed here does not refer to concentrated overview presented on the previous part of this paper, but to a narrative spread through international level and in addition, the media, which is able to form opinions on national levels. The USA as a world power has influential position in regard to creating a globally dominating strategic narrative about the DPRK, as D. Kim (2016, 33) points out—outside the Islamic world, the DPRK continues to be the only enemy of the USA. However, such cliched narrative should not be accepted without further judgement. For instance, reflecting on works of Hayden White (1988) on epistemology, how does one know what is really the truth? More specifically, how much of the narrative many

hold about the DPRK is fiction? Second reason for revising the narrative is tendency of stories to highlight certain aspects and leave others in the shadows. Thirdly, as White (Ibid.) claimed about historical narratives—the content of the form reflects in a narrative, meaning narratives reflect the nature of their creators. In order to see the DPRK without a filter, critical analysis is needed. Influential factor of biased narrative, as Dukalskis (2016, 492) brings out, is the fact that the most accessible source of information about the DPRK is defectors, yet latter obviously have anti-regime feelings, which makes it impossible to generalize those opinions as representative.

The complication of biased narrative is its power to overshadow other perspectives the more it is repeated. Oftentimes, the DPRK is depicted as remnant of a time long gone. Conversely, it might be the international community resists acknowledging dissimilar narrative. The DPRK has been witnessed to take small steps to modernization. Yet international community seems to be stuck in the *status quo* of the Korean War era, considering the leader of this state as audacious and inexperienced man with a desire of conquest, which Kim Il Sung indeed once was. Nowadays Kim Jong Un can be seen renewing regime norms, demonstrated by occasions like appearing in public with his wife, which his father never did (Mark 2018), and not having any statues or pictures of him spread across streets. Additionally, he has been introducing wider variety of entertainment, such as American characters in theatre shows (Ibid.) and hosting a South Korean pop-concert (Ji 2018). Within past few months there has been effort to normalize diplomatic relations, as recent high-profile and forthcoming meetings with key players show (*BBC news* 2018). Bandow (2017) reflects on his recent visit comparing it to one he had quarter of a century ago, contemplating the state is not anything close to capitalism, but it is not the Korea of Kim Il Sung either—regime development is significant. All those steps might not bring immediate improvements regarding the regime but in case these signs are disregarded as unimportant—what would then constitute as an actual change? It is reasonable to expect that significant advancements in the regime would take effect over time.

Instead of directing efforts to acknowledging the changes, label of rogue state seems to be attached to the DPRK. As noted before, the USA has powerful place in influencing opinions. The USA has given the DPRK identification of being **rogue state**. It was put to use during President Reagan administration to brand enemies with a common label (Lebow 2016, 193). Even though officially dropped after a few years, it is still widely used among scholars and media. Given label has a certain stigma attached to it, how to think of and treat such a state—feeling of being superior. In spite of the DPRK expressing compassion after 9/11 and positioning themselves against terrorism, they shortly after received another label of belonging into Axis of Evil (Joo 2014, 31). This raises

the question, whether labelling any state with identification is the consequence or the reason for constitution of its meaning.

Another issue to be brought out in regard to biased narrative is one-sided interpretation of ‘brainwashing’—conditioning people to adopt radically different mindsets. It is common in Western culture to judge ideological construct of the DPRK on the basis of it manipulating with people. In a similar fashion marketing in capitalist societies uses heavy implantation of ideas with ‘black-and-white’ marketing techniques, playing on people’s emotions and subconscious manipulations, which is impossible to note and reject. It is especially concerning since, in addition to products and services, everything from people to ideas are heavily marketed. Even the DPRK itself has fallen victim of being the object of black-and-white marketing, in other words the mental picture of the DPRK is promoted with negative labels already attached to it. In addition, capitalism only works if there is a need and best way to create one is by means of generating an addiction. Capitalist aggressive marketing and questionable sales techniques are considered a norm while ideological influencing in the DPRK is condemned, despite restriction of critical thinking and elevation of emotion being a common thread among them.

The DPRK case has also fallen a victim to current technology-driven spectacle of virality. As Manson (2018) explains, the phenomenon of virality reveals in culture which is overruled by what gets attention. In the interconnected world information spreads fast and reaches far. He explains that in the event of culture being dominated by something, people assume this phenomenon being significant. Subsequently, the DPRK is widely discussed in media. It often spirals into debates where the goal is to win, as Descartes (1970, 69) ponders, therefore instead of reasoning, validation of probability is pursued. The fact that the DPRK-related issue has spread beyond political and policy debates allows citizens, who have a strong opinion in this question, to have the power of influencing and judging decisions of their state in regard of that issue. Additionally, leaders with a strong opinion have power to act upon it. For example, President Trump chooses to voice mainstream opinion of accusing the DPRK, all the while his specialists on the DPRK do not agree with him (Levitz 2018). And even if president’s tweets do not constitute a policy (Melville 2018), they make diplomatic interactions between the DPRK and other states more problematic.

The USA undeniably has lots of power on world stage, resulting in many aspects of previous discussion criticizing practices of the USA. Nonetheless, this is not end that was meant to be achieved, but rather means to an end of creating perspective and elevating critical thinking in reader. The main problem of biased narrative is the scale it has achieved due to virality of the issue.

This makes factors like distorted public opinion and lack of critical thinking part of the DPRK equation, which further complicates carrying out diplomatic practices.

2.2. Identities of states

National identities are a standard base for analysis among constructivists. It helps to understand international affairs in terms of social interactions and influences than on power and material basis. For two reasons, this work is going to follow framework proposed by Ned Lebow. First, instead of one solid identity, Lebow considers states to have multiple identifications simultaneously, which, he claims, are one of the most important vehicles for domestic and international change. It is a unique sort of approach on identity, which gives the opportunity to explore the case of the DPRK from still unconsidered angle. Secondly, Lebow analyses international affairs as a society, not a system like Wendtian constructivism does. This is significant since systemic approach dismisses differences among actors, which is especially important in such dissimilar instance as the DPRK. The following part of this chapter gives brief overview of Lebow's theory on national identifications and then explains how this framework conforms to the case of DPRK.

2.2.1. Lebow and national identifications

Drawing on Lebow's constructivist theory of state identifications, described in "National Identities and International Relations" (2016), it is possible to conclude that not only are the identifications the DPRK gives itself largely different from those most states and their institutions impose on themselves, but the identity construction process differs from the usual pattern as well due to heavily exercised totalitarianism. Lebow bases his state identifications on those of people. Humans are said to have identifications they give themselves based on their roles, affiliations, relation to body and understanding of past which they then compare to identifications others give them. Lebow explains states to create identifications exactly the same way, except there is no reflective self to disagree with identifications others have given—states only have *body politic* to which institutions, leaders, citizens and foreign actors give labels. In the case of the DPRK citizens and institutions do not play a role. Inside the state, leader is the only one giving state identifications. Lebow's theory assumes that due to state not having actual 'self', *body politic* cannot reject any identifications given nor can it feel emotion towards them. Here is why the DPRK's case departs from the theory—since all state identifications given go through one person, he has the possibility

to accept or reject identifications imposed on his state and can show his emotions towards them through any actions which ultimately become his foreign policy. But with that freedom of acting as a filter for those identifications, comes also responsibility of bearing their weight of them. Responsibility is even heavier as these labels are in most part negative, especially considering identifications that are promoted domestically in the DPRK are quite different.

In order to understand, how state identifications model individual identifications, latter need to be explained. Lebow (2016) demonstrates that individuals never have one constant identity, there are several that are imposed from two sides (see *Figure 2*). Firstly, there are identifications created by ‘inner self’ which are self-understandings based on four factors: roles one has in society (e.g. mother, teacher), affiliations (e.g. Christianity), relation to body (i.e. when one is sick they do not feel as ‘themselves’) and understandings of past (i.e. memories from one’s life). Secondly, there are identifications, jointly called social self, that are imposed by actors such as society, political actors and government. Lebow (Ibid.) argues, that altogether these individual identifications are liable to change, they are conflicting each other at times and reflexivity constitutes due to inner self reformulating identifications of social self.

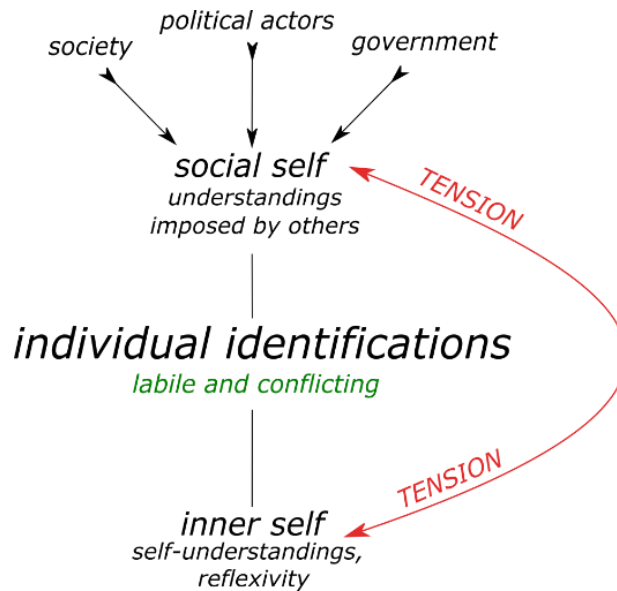


Figure 2. Lebow’s description of individual identifications
 Source: Completed by author, based on Lebow (2016)

Lebow’s (Ibid.) argument is that state identifications are created the same way as individual identification, with one important exception. There are identifications imposed on state from two

sides, just like individual identifications—domestic side, such as societal groups, leaders, media, and from international side, actors such as foreign leaders, international organizations, and institutions (see *Figure 3*). Domestic identifications are likewise based on roles, affiliations, relation to body (people and territory) and understandings of past, usually propagating identifications which align with actors’ political goals or psychological needs (often by means of influencing collective or official memory). Moreover, they are similarly conflicting and liable to change according to context. The major difference is that *body politic*, despite having institutional expression, does not have conscious self to oppose to or agree with neither domestic nor foreign identifications imposed on it. Consequently, since state itself does not have a psyche, identifications’ creation process does not involve emotions nor psychological needs. Lebow (Ibid.) argues therefore, that states cannot long for ontological security (contrary to Giddens’s theory). Rather, conflicts emerge due to plurality of actors imposing many different identifications, constituting in ontological insecurity (e.g. culture wars) instead.

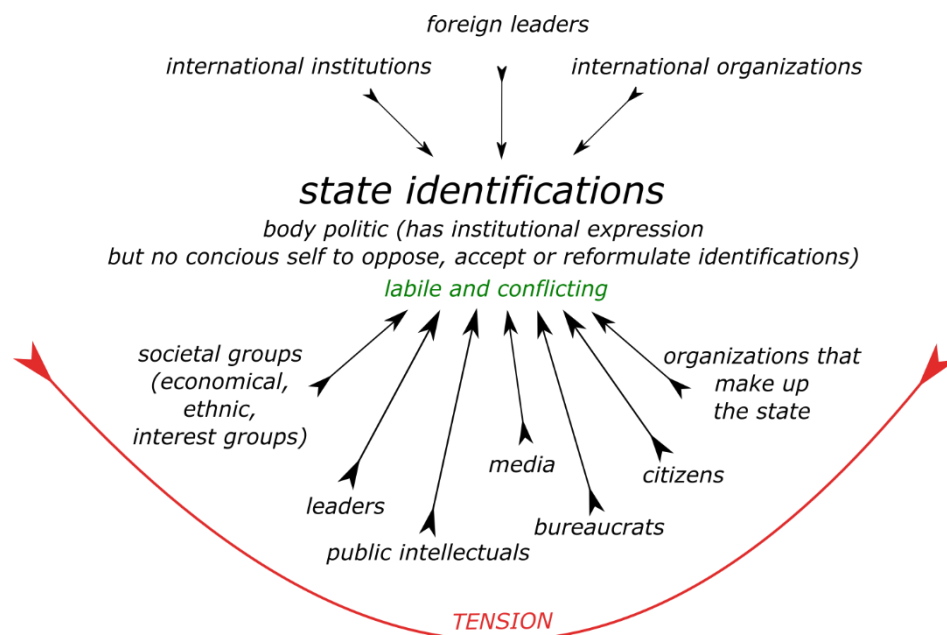


Figure 3. Lebow’s description of state identifications
 Source: Completed by author, based on Lebow (2016)

2.2.2. Identification conflicts of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

Adapting Lebow’s theory of identifications to the case of the DPRK, the result is a version of identifications’ formation that combines both previously described processes (see *Figure 4*). Just

like in the case of other national identifications, state identifications of the DPRK are liable to change and imposed on states from two sides, domestic (leader of the DPRK) and international (e.g. foreign leaders, international institutions and organizations). However, taking out the plurality of domestic actors from the equation of state identifications' formation, leader of the DPRK acts as the psyche of the state. Therefore, as personal identifications' formation process indicates, there is a reflexive self, unlike democratic states, that can reformulate, argue or agree with, or perhaps most importantly act upon identifications imposed from outside actors. This creates tension directly between leader of the DPRK and other states. In the case of the DPRK leader as state's representation of psyche also has emotions, his psychological needs and political interests involved in the process of state identifications' creation process. Concentration of power gives freedom to formulate identifications for domestic presentation to be to leader's own liking, nevertheless he carries responsibility at the same time. A case in point would be response of Kim Jong Un to constant hostile references made by President Trump, which is believed to be the first official announcement a DPRK leader has issued to the world under his name (*The New York Times* 2017). The bright side of this is the chance to influence the course of this state by influencing just one key person, which is again an advantage that typically does not exist.

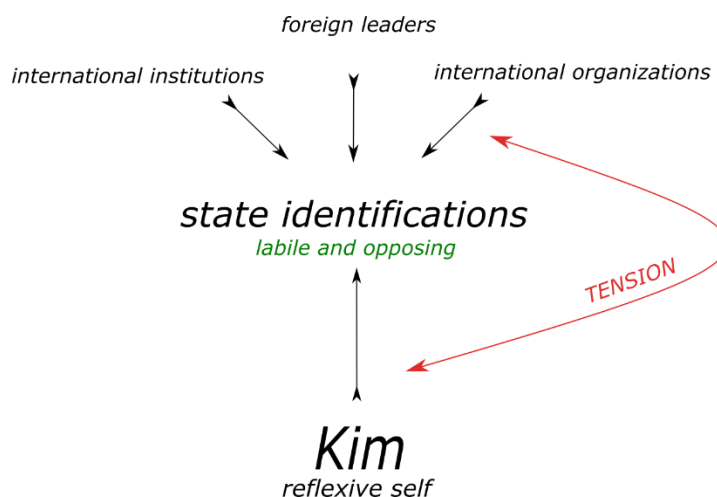


Figure 4. State identifications' formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Source: author

Because of the reflexive self the DPRK has due to its concentrated power in hands of Kim Jong Un, there are tensions between labels others impose on the DPRK and what Kim Jong Un considers his state to be. The first reflexivity tension arises from vision of Kim Jong Un for his regime as a

legacy from his fathers. Y. Park (2014, 11) points out that the DPRK's monolithic system, Juche ideology and military-first policy have influenced decision-making process of leaders for decades. Because of having developed the Juche ideology, S. Park (2016, 61) discusses, the DPRK has managed to avoid downfall inherent to other communist regimes, however it has spurred the DPRK into greater isolation. International community tends to take this state as leftover of communism that world would be better off without. This could cause leader of the country to feel even greater need for deepening nationalism domestically and deploy any means to keep regime alive. The greater resistance from international community, the greater will to fight for it from the DPRK. Similarly to preserving a legacy, the DPRK considers itself a proud survivor and upholder of socialist regime. International community refers to the DPRK rather as nuisance. Despite human rights violations, in name of humanity, there is still constant need to help the state with humanitarian and food aid. This tension similarly to previous one encourages the DPRK to prove its point of socialist system working, regardless of whether it is true or efficient. The need to survive is that much stronger for the reason that others have not.

Another tension can be observed between domestic identification of stability against the outside imposed identification of conservatism. One of the reasons why the DPRK might be protecting its system is sense of stability it gives them. While everything is set by a system, it is more convenient to pursue old practices than convert to new ones. As Hitler famously said, think a thousand times before taking a decision, but never turn back in case of encountering a thousand difficulties after that. This idea is fit to describe the DPRK's attachment to the ideology and systems they have created. Foreign eye sees the same thing as stubbornness and unwillingness to move on from audacious practices that are involved in their system. Interconnecting with latter, there is another tension between what the DPRK labels as a just system for keeping order. The DPRK does not have the energy to invent the wheel, thus they borrow blueprints of systems elsewhere and adapt them to their needs (Pollack 2017). It is crucial to note that even though they identify as socialist state, many of their questionable understandings and practices reflect those of Japanese style fascism. As Japanese colonization on Korean peninsula directly preceded the state of the DPRK, they have adopted many blueprints of Japanese fascism era, such as keeping purity of race, ultra-nationalism, divine figure of leader and militarism (Fisher 2016). At present, when there are no powers to justify the darkest practices of this ideology any more, international actors regard it as human rights violations. The DPRK is not on a different page than international community, but rather reading a different book entirely. To find a common language, understanding from all sides is essential.

The most pressing issue of current times is the DPRK seeing themselves as a nuclear state for they possess nuclear weapons. Enthusiasm for nuclear capacities is nothing new as already in the 1950s the DPRK sent its specialists to gain knowledge in the Soviet Union, which has resulted in nuclear industry of 3000 professionals and over 200 top-class specialists on the field (S. Park 2016, 65). On the other end international community considers the DPRK a rogue state that violates many international agreements, including the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). Since most states have accepted the NPT, it legitimizes the states that made the agreement to have that power and exercise pressure for everybody to accept it. There is a resistance from the DPRK against the NPT, being negligent of the fact that some states have the right to decide who should or should not have nuclear capabilities. For example, Bandow (2017) states that on his recent visit to the DPRK when asking his hosts whether the DPRK would abandon the nuclear program in return for the USA dropping hostile stand, they replied they would be happy to discuss dropping it if the USA, the PRC and the Russian Federation would do the same. Consequently, the DPRK identified as nuclear state and continued to develop the program until a peace treaty was recently agreed on (Harrison 2018) along with mutual agreement between the ROK and the DPRK to denuclearize the peninsula. It is important to understand that, in their mind, they are giving away something they rightfully consider owning. Therefore, engagement to agree on further steps should be consistent, however subtle for it being sensitive issue. Second tension involving possession derives from relation to its territory, as the DPRK considers the whole Korean peninsula to be theirs (as does the ROK). The international community sees the DPRK as destructive neighbour of a successful one. This tension may be losing relevance, though, as the number of people who still remember, including leaders of both Koreas, peninsula being one nation is decreasing.

There is one more tension that can be observed, caused by reflexivity of the DPRK. It involves the DPRK seeing themselves as a victim of excessive pressure to their land and regime while on the other end of the spectrum international community considers the DPRK strategic threat, to East Asian region primarily. Due to large gap in understanding, this elevates the feeling of injustice in Kim Jong Un which may prompt him to provocative actions as even the most rational actors have emotions. On the other hand, hope for a peace treaty signed, having arisen recently, lowers the general perception of the DPRK as threat, therefore making trust-building easier hereafter.

3. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this work have shown the importance of considering biased narrative and differences among identifications next to capabilities, policy tools and domestic policy. The thesis of this paper claimed the study of the DPRK is neglecting dimensions from complete understanding which would explain tensions within the North Korean issue and what makes it difficult to unravel. The problems discovered in the second half of this work can be considered important part of the full picture. However, at the same time it must be taken into account that a major step of agreeing to a peace treaty and denuclearization (Harrison 2018) has taken place without any of the tensions between identifications being diminished nor narrative having changed dramatically before this step. Additionally, any strategies on influencing the DPRK mentioned in current scholarly literature, such as pressure beyond sanctions, enhanced deterrence or targeted humanitarian aid to pressure regime, have not been employed either. Therefore, if these were not preconditions for such an affirmative step, then how are these findings relevant?

Besides peace treaty and nuclear questions there are long term relations, trust and common apprehension to recover. The part 2.1 of this paper concluded perspective shift is needed for noticing biased narrative, especially due to virality of the DPRK related issues. The part 2.2 of this paper concluded that there are several splits between identifications the DPRK gives themselves and those which others impose on them. Tensions of identifications are relevant as they give insight to how to build relations long term, more specifically how to approach this state from a place of understanding. It is essential to bring all parties on the same page in terms of awareness and take consistent but cautious steps. On the affirmative side though, this work has found that in order to influence the course of the DPRK, engagement with the leader plays a crucial role. For that reason, engaging with the leader is a major step forward as such engagement is possible through current talks between Kim Jong Un and several key foreign parties.

The first gap discovered is biased narrative and problems virality of it creates. Virality has power to influence the decision-making process of states regarding the DPRK. Compellingly, such problem is seldom mentioned in academic literature, albeit it is distorting general perception and

seriously complicating diplomatic communication. Topic that in current academic literature deals with biased narrative is the question of rationality. Several scholars have spent significant parts of their writings on disproving the argument of Kim Jong Un acting irrationally, which is claimed to be true in media outlets. Still, current literature does not portray how false logical leaps are made in even wider respect. As Foucault (1975) argued that

if you are not like everyone else, it is because you are abnormal, if you are abnormal, it is because you're sick. These three categories: not being like everyone else, not being normal and being sick, are still very different and have been assimilated to each other.

The lack of critical thinking leads to ask different questions from those which could possibly be more relevant to solving complications around the DPRK. If different questions were asked, wider insight might develop. Instead of asking, how to denuclearize the DPRK, are we ready for nuclearized DPRK, could be asked. Is the DPRK responsible enough to manage nuclear arsenal? Why is it difficult for them to give up the program? Instead of asking what current strategy of the USA is, are they capable of adopting new perspective could be asked. Instead of asking how the USA or the PRC have influenced the DPRK, which steps are missing from a successful negotiation could be asked. Instead of searching what might be gained, what everybody is willing to sacrifice could be asked. Instead of asking is one rational, in which circumstances is one able to trust and to be trusted could be asked. Instead of asking which foreign policy tools the DPRK has decided to use, why particular tools are used could be asked. Instead of asking how the DPRK exercises oppression, might the DPRK exist as an interconnected state of the world could be asked. Instead of asking how the shadow market's growth influences the regime, is there a possibility of the DPRK operating a successful market system while still staying loyal to its ideology could be asked. Instead of asking how many international players are involved, does virality of the particular issue play a role in this equation could be asked.

Second gap detected is between different identifications of the DPRK. For instance, old grudges of historic memories still cause tension between the DPRK and the USA because the DPRK (Kim Jong Un) identifies itself mostly with positive identifications (e.g. proud survivor, stable state, legacy), in righteous terms (nuclear state, owner of Korean peninsula) or in suffering terms (victim of oppression from international community). These identifications the DPRK gives itself currently (legacy-continuator, survivor, nuclear state, victim) explain why they keep developing their nuclear arsenal, consistently need to keep regime alive, feel the need to show the world they are successfully doing it and how the feeling of injustice makes them distrust cooperation, like described in current academic literature. These identifications however elucidate consequences of

the issue and not roots of it. The DPRK senses international community not respecting their identity and who they are in the world. The mainstream perspective from international community is to define the DPRK in negative terms (e.g. nuisance, human rights' violator, conservative, threat). Such state of polar opposite judgements has created split that makes the issue difficult to unravel. Especially because during this split growing bigger, both sides push to make apparent their version is the right one.

Interconnecting with the question of polar opposite identifications, Kim Jong Un seems to have hard time finding common language with international players and forming diplomatic relations because they live in a drastically contrasting narrative from what others create of them. Considering a negative narrative is widespread, the DPRK is in a serious disadvantage in promoting a more positive one. Two parties, the DPRK and international community, seem to live not on different pages of the book but reading different books entirely. Tensions between the DPRK and international community are difficult to tackle for the reason that the DPRK does not see themselves as a culprit, but rather carrier of legacy and a system. Furthermore, the higher resistance they encounter, the greater the need to prove themselves. Mutual understanding is essential to find, which would most probably occur through bilateral talks. As Bandow (2017) puts it, instead of focusing on capitalist revolution, the lesson taken from the China case should be the importance of purely talking things out. Several experts have seen the need for negotiations, however, they do not emphasize radically different perceptions of world and identifications of the DPRK as cause for it. This thesis additionally found it is important to communicate with the leader on a personal level, which is exemplified by high-profile meetings of Kim Jong Un, taking place in recent months. When heads of states become people rather than words in books and concepts in ideology, it is easier for Kim empathize and find common grounds with them. The same goes for leaders with whom he is meeting. Keeping consistent communication with the DPRK and lowering international threat levels by means of changing the viral narrative also play a crucial role. These conclusions contain suggestions for future engagement which seem not to appear in current academic discussion.

When discussing issues surrounding the DPRK, the USA cannot be left out of the discussion. The USA as a strategically important player can be seen in current academic literature as well in gaps this work has described. In current literature it is mostly argued in respects of pressuring the PRC, its questionable tactics in Iraq and during Korean war, its stance toward the DPRK and conflicting strategies over time. The gap of ignoring biased narrative brings out the role of the USA as creator or conveyor of named narrative. No matter which way the DPRK-related problem is looked at, the

USA has a role to play in it. This implies the USA also stands on a place to transform the situation. The strategy pursued eventually can take several directions, which may not be conducted with a goal of understanding. Rather, another trade offer is more likely, especially considering said state is run by a businessman.

By the time of finishing this thesis, the DPRK is to have talks with the USA shortly. This meeting has potential to substantially change the circumstances, just as the meeting with Moon Jae-in did. There is a possibility of the outdated narrative to be shaken up. As this was one of the main obstacles discovered in way of solving the DPRK related issues, these evidences reflect positive developments. In addition, such agreements as peace treaty need common ground for discussion. This must be the case for new developments, which is another example of progress as the DPRK could previously be seen living in another world speaking its own language. This affair has also developed the most appropriate way, because two Koreans solved the problem. As Zhang (2016, 78) contends, Koreans need to self-determine their identities and not let it be set by foreign powers and treaties. Besides, it is most probable for two Koreans to find mutual understanding. As previously mentioned, it is easier to adjust course of the DPRK by interacting on personal level with Kim Jong Un, which current talks have also proved to be true. The next effective step is to keep consistent communication with the DPRK without any abrupt changes. Reflecting on Sharp (2009, 195), diplomacy makes world run smoother, especially so if representatives “keep talking and do not worry if the talks do not seem to be getting anywhere.”

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