

Constructions of Identity and Treath in North Korea's "Diplomatic War" Discourse

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes North Korea's most central foreign policy discourse in the post-Cold War era: the discourse of the Diplomatic War. Embedding North Korea's nuclear strive and its conflictual relations with a significant Other – the U.S. – the analysis of this discourse provides crucial insights into the immaterial factors driving North Korea's foreign relations in the post-Cold War era. In specific, the study focusses on two central characteristics of the discourse, i.e. the writing of identity and the construction of dangers and fear. Applying a poststructuralist, discourse analytical approach the study investigates the constitutive and performative relation between identity and threat constructions and North Korean foreign policy in the context of the nuclear issue, focusing on the question how identity rhetoric and attributions are used to legitimize its nuclear endeavors.

Keywords: North Korea, Identity, Threat/Danger, Poststructuralism, Diplomatic War discourse, Foreign Policy

RESUMEN

Este trabajo analiza el núcleo central del discurso de política exterior de Corea del Norte en la era de la Posguerra Fría: el discurso de la guerra diplomática. Incluyendo el esfuerzo del rearme nuclear y sus conflictivas relaciones con el significativo *Otro* – los Estados Unidos – el análisis de este discurso proporciona información crucial sobre los factores inmateriales que conducen las relaciones exteriores de Corea del Norte en la era posterior a la Guerra Fría. En concreto, el estudio se centra en dos características centrales del discurso, como son la escritura de la identidad y la construcción del peligro y el miedo. Recurriendo a un enfoque basado en un discurso analítico postestructuralista, el estudio investiga la relación constitutiva y performativa entre identidad y construcción de amenazas y la política exterior de Corea del Norte en el contexto de la cuestión nuclear, centrándose en la

cuestión de cómo la retórica de la identidad y las atribuciones se utilizan para legitimar sus esfuerzos nucleares.

Palabras clave: Corea del Norte, identidad, amenaza / peligro, postestructuralismo, guerra diplomática, discurso, política exterior

RESUM

Aquest treball analitza el nucli central del discurs de política exterior de Corea del Nord en l'era de la Postguerra Freda: el discurs de la guerra diplomàtica. Incloent-hi l'esforç del rearmament nuclear i les seves relacions conflictives amb l'*Altre* significatiu - els Estats Units- l'anàlisi d'aquest discurs proporciona informació crucial sobre els factors immaterials que condueixen les relacions exteriors de Corea del Nord en l'era posterior a la Guerra Freda. En concret, l'estudi se centra en dues característiques centrals del discurs, com són l'escriptura de la identitat i la construcció del perill i la por. Recorrent a un enfocament basat en un discurs analític postestructuralista, l'estudi investiga la relació constitutiva i performativa entre identitat i construcció d'amenaques i la política exterior de Corea del Nord en el context de la qüestió nuclear, centrant-se en la qüestió de com la retòrica de la identitat i les atribucions s'utilitzen per legitimar les seves pretensions nuclears.

Paraules clau: Corea del Nord, identitat, amenaça / perill, postestructuralisme, guerra diplomàtica, discurs, política exterior

1. Introduction: Arguing for a New Theoretical Approach to the Analysis of North Korean Foreign Policy¹

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North Korea's foreign policy in general and particularly its strive to go nuclear have long attracted the attention of International Relations (IR) and Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) scholars. For too long, however, this scholarship was characterized by what may be described as a dominance of description. That is, the analysis of North Korea's foreign policy was – and often still is – dominated by non-theoretical works, which do not produce any generalized insights into the factors that help explain North Korean behavior in the nuclear issue. Against this background, the published debate between Victor Cha and David Kang (2003), who proposed a neorealist and neoliberal approach, respectively, to make sense of the DPRK's seemingly erratic foreign policy, was an important contribution (see also: Ballbach, 2013). At the same time, however, the theoretical possibilities are much broader than the debate between Cha and Kang suggests and it is important to note that the research on North Korean foreign policy has more recently moved beyond conventional materialist approaches such as neorealism or neoliberalism. In this process, the theoretical approach of constructivism has become particularly prominent and a number of scholars have provided alterna-

¹ This paper draws on the author's dissertation thesis, titled "Producing Boundaries: Identity and North Korean Foreign Policy" (2005a)

tive assessments of the DPRK's nuclear program that defy the standard formulas and instead begun to explore such 'immaterial factors' as identity, norms, or worldviews to help explain North Korea's motives and behavior in the nuclear issue (e.g. Kim, S.C. 2009; Hymans, 2008). Undermining the common assumption that the North Korean leadership's nuclear intentions are a measured response to the external environment, these authors instead argue that North Korea's decision to go nuclear is not based on typical cost-benefit analysis but driven by 'non-rational factors' such as emotions, which link identities with certain foreign policy choices (e.g. Hymans, 2006: 13).

While this study shares the basic constructivist assumption that identity matters, it takes the logic of identity one step further, focusing on the social space of Self and Other and addressing the question how constructions of identity and threat interrelate to North Korea's foreign policy in the context of the nuclear issue². This analysis is conducted by scrutinizing North Korea's primary foreign policy discourse in the post-Cold War era, the discourse of the Diplomatic War, which embeds the debate on the most important political project of the DPRK in the post-Cold War era, the nuclear project and the related political conflict with the U.S. Central to the poststructuralist approach applied in this study is the assumption that those constructions of identity and threat that permeate the discourse of the Diplomatic War are in no way pre-given, but are constituted in difference, exposed through representations of dichotomized categories (e.g. of good/bad, secure/insecure or moral/immoral), and made possible through practices that precede the essence of identity.

2. State, Foreign Policy, and Identity: The Theoretical and Methodological Background of the Study

The theoretical starting point of this study is the poststructuralist re-theorization of the state, which negates the assumption of the state as an essentialized presence. As Roxanne Doty (2003: 12; see also Dunn, 2009) has provocatively put it: "There is no such thing as 'the state'." To argue as such is, of course, not to deny the existence of such entities as governmental bureaucracies and institutions or particular subjects (such as politicians, diplomats, or soldiers) acting in the name of a state. Rather, the initial premise that there is no such thing as the 'state' leads to a perspective of 'the state' as a discursively produced structural/structuring effect that relies on constant acts of performativity to call it into

² Thus far, only a very small number of authors have begun exploring the Self/Other distinction for understanding North Korea's political behavior. See, for example: Cho (2011) or Bleiker (2005)

being. What we consider as 'the state' is, in other words, only made possible by a set of practices producing 'the state,' which establish identity and fix difference [e.g. Campbell, 1998: 9-13; Weber, 1998: 78]³. 'The state' is therefore neither simply present nor is it ever finished as an entity, but is (and has to be) always in a process of becoming, in the process of being constituted (Devetak, 1995: 32).

If we argue that there is no stable object from which foreign and security policies are drawn, but that they rely upon and produce particular understandings of the state, then this leads to a very different understanding of "what foreign policy is and what it does" (Laffey, 2000: 431). Conventional IR/FPA theories tend to see foreign policy simply as the policies and internally mediated responses of (pre-given) states oriented toward the external world [e.g. Rosenau, 1987: 1]. Post-structuralists, however, reject this taken-for-granted assumption of the existence of the state and of foreign policy as its actions, and thus discard the assumption that the state in question (here: North Korea), in ontological terms, comes before the policy. Foreign policy is then not simply the response of a pre-given subject to its environment, but the means through which a particular mode of subjectivity is (re-)produced (Campbell, 1998: x; see also: Laffey, 2000). This alternative conception conceives foreign policy as a political performance that demarcates boundaries between states and, thus, 'makes foreign' certain actors and events. Foreign policy, from this view, is not a bridge between preexisting states with secure identities, but a "boundary-producing political performance" central to the production and (re)production of the state and identity in whose name it operates (Ashley, 1987). This conception of foreign policy as a practice of differentiation quite naturally suggests an intimate relation to identity, for the demarcation of boundaries naturally involves the delineation of an inside from an outside, a Self from Others. Foreign policy is, thus, inherently linked to identity in the following two ways: Firstly, by emphasizing that identity must be understood as a representational practice through which certain articulations of foreign policies are made possible to begin with (i.e., performances of Self and Other); and, secondly, by determining how that which is represented through certain foreign policies simultaneously reassures the identity at stake (Bormann, 2008: 6).

³ These enframing practices refer to the discursive practices of Self/Other and inclusion/exclusion which encompass both disciplinary practices that seek to normalize and homogenize a population, giving it a sense of internal unity, and exclusionary practices that seek to guarantee the security of this domestic society by differentiating it from, and securing it against, a threatening outside.

3. The Discourse of the Diplomatic War: Thematic Context and Discursive Constructions of Identity and Threat

The main concern of this chapter is to expose how difference is figured and identity and danger are constructed in North Korea's most central foreign policy discourse in the post-Cold War era, the Diplomatic War. In specific, the following analysis first summarizes the central narratives of the discourse, before analyzing the main constructions of identity and threat contained in the discourse.

3.1. Writing the Diplomatic War

While the discourse of the Diplomatic War is, as every discourse, complex, in constant motion and deals with various issues and contents, its thematic focus revolves around several main narratives that are closely related to the way the DPRK interprets the political reality of the post-Cold War era and how it defines its own place in this new international environment. In the thematic center of the discourse is the scripting of the post-Cold War conflict with the U.S., particularly the question of North Korea's nuclear program. The signifying process of 'writing' the Diplomatic War was thus aimed at inscribing a set of particular meanings and understandings to the related events and the leaders in P'yŏngyang constructed a narrative that was supposed to answer all the questions that were raised by them.

The discourse thematically emanates from the global eruptions following the end of the Cold War, which "has resulted in great changes in the global political structure and relations of power" (Chun, 2004: 1). On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union was presented as confirmation for the superiority of the North Korean system, which avoided the dramatic failures of the Soviet Union such as Moscow's policies of reform and opening to the free market, its failure to establish and maintain a firm ideology to manage their societies or its detachment of the military from the policy realm (e.g. Chun, 2004; Kim, C.U. 2008). On the other hand, however, the political situation following the demise of the Soviet Union was interpreted as even more dangerous to the DPRK than before, which portrayed itself as being wholly surrounded by hostile forces that aims to undermine its legitimacy and strive to overthrow its system by military and other means (Park, 2002: 145). For example, Ri Jong Chol (2012: 21-22) states that

"[d]uring the Cold War, international politics was characterized by a confrontation of strength between socialism and capitalism and, more concretely bipolar confrontation between the two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. The end of the Cold War raised a series of new issues, such as the choice

between a unipolar or multipolar world and war or peace. The outcome was neither a multipolar world nor peace. The United States, which emerged as the only superpower, used the end of the Cold War to intensify its onslaught against the anti-imperialist independent forces in order to realize its ambition of making the world a US-led unipolar world. The new international political landscape pitted the anti-imperialist independent forces against the United States.”

North Korean texts assert that the end of the Cold War basically diminished the legitimacy of the U.S.’ strategic goal of world domination, which left the U.S. in need of new threats to legitimize their supposed political goal of world supremacy. As is stated by Chun San Pil (2004: 15), the U.S. thus concentrated its efforts and aggression against anti-imperialist forces, which is how the DPRK is said to have become the main focus of U.S. post-Cold War foreign policy.

“The Cold War did not end in Korea. Entering the mid-1990s, because the US-led imperialist forces directed the spearhead of their attack at Korea, it experienced severe trials and difficulties, which would decide its destiny. (...) The United States considered Korea the most dangerous country and the major obstacle to its ambition of world domination, because Korea continued to uphold the banner of anti-imperialism and socialism in the international arena and, moreover, it is situated at the heart of Northeast Asia.” (Ri, 2012: 22-23).

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According to this interpretation, the end of the Cold War did not change the basic structure of the underlying conflict, but only altered its primary actors, now pitting the imperialist U.S. against the DPRK, described as an ‘anti-imperialist, socialist bulwark’ and the biggest obstacle for the U.S.’ plan of world domination (e.g. Chun, 2004: 15). This interpretation is at the heart of North Korea’s redefinition of its own (self-perceived) status and standing in the post-Cold War order, which culminates in the seemingly bizarre yet powerful construction that the end of the Cold War has led to a shift in the global political order in that the “formation centered on the Soviet-US confrontation changed to one that is based on the contest of power between North Korea and the United States” (Ibid.).

This is the discursive context in which the nuclear issue and the related conflict with the U.S. is discussed in North Korea – and in which the discourse of the Diplomatic War is further explored.

“In short, the situation on the Korean peninsula after the Cold War can be summarized as the sum total of an intense diplomatic game, a war without gunshot and without resorting to arms, in which both sides rack their brains for winning a victory. Who will, after all, emerge victorious in this war, a war without gunshot? (...) [North] Korea is now having a diplomatic war only against the United States. Diplomatic war has become the main current of war after the Cold War.” (Nam, 2000: 3, 75)

While there are many facets to how the nuclear issue is interpreted in the discourse, it is sufficient to say at this point that the nuclear narrative, while never static, combines an overarching DPRK-style nuclear nationalism that portrays North Korea as an inherently threatened yet modern, self-reliant and powerful nuclear state, beholden and accountable to no-one but itself as it prescribes itself a unique status among the nuclear powers (Hayes and Bruce 2011; Ballbach 2015a; 2015b).

“The Korea-US nuclear standoff can be said to be a process of putting an end to the US strategy for domination of the Korean peninsula aimed at bogging the peninsula down in a quagmire of war for the destruction of the entire Korean nation itself. Consequently, the Korea-US showdown over the “nuclear issue” is Korea’s most sacred struggle for national salvation in defence of dignity and sovereignty of the whole nation, and an all-out confrontation between the entire Korean nation and the United States, more specifically, between justice and injustice, and between peace and anti-peace. This is (...) [a] sacred struggle for national salvation” (Kim, I.O. 2008: 37)

While the discourse was flexible enough to allow for modifications in the narratives, e.g. in that North Korea long denied the development and possession of nuclear weapons, stating until 2002/2003 that its nuclear program was a mere energy program, it becomes clear that the development of the Diplomatic War discourse is characterized by a number of significant turning points. For instance, one important turning point was the U.S. invasion in Iraq, when the texts began to emphasize that “the sovereignty of the country and the security of the nation can be protected only when a country has a physical deterrent force, a strong military deterrent force capable of decisively repelling any attack to be made by any types of sophisticated weapons.” (KCNA, May 12, 2003). Another significant turning point in the discourse was the passing of Kim Jong Il, whose legacy was now inherently linked to the country’s status as a nuclear weapons state.

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3.2. Us vs. Them: The Writing of Identity in the Diplomatic War Discourse

To poststructuralists, identity is given meaning through the inscription of difference (Bouveng, 2010: 34). As Connolly (1991: 64) states, identity is always “established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognized. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity.” The constitution of identity is thus achieved through the inscription of boundaries that serve to demarcate an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’, a ‘Self’ from an ‘Other’, a ‘domestic’ from a ‘foreign.’ Poststructuralism’s relational conception of identity therefore implies that identity is always given meaning through (reference to) something it is not: to speak of

the Self as 'moral' and 'threatened' is to constitute another identity or set of identities – the Other/s – as 'amoral' and 'threatening'. On the international level, this logic implies that foreign policy discourses articulate a national Self and a (series of) national Other(s): This is the space where identity is defined and situated in relation to various Others or signifiers (Bouveng 2010: 34) – and it is re-inscribed when the distinction is “ambiguous and in need of differentiation” (Campbell 1998: 113). In this process of erecting its boundaries, what is left outside of them is indispensable for the identity of the state: the Other is understood as “an ontological necessity in that it is only through its constitution that the Self becomes a meaningful subject” (Hansen 2007: 4). While a state identity thus demonstrates distinctiveness in international relations, foreign policy is an important practice of differentiation with which those boundaries between the inside and the outside are demarked, thus distinguishing the identity in whose name they operate from counter-identities. As these differentiations are the subject to a particular hierarchical order, through its political discourses such as the Diplomatic War the North Korean state creates idealized pictures of Self and Other with which the national is hailed and the foreign or undesirable is differentiated.

In fact, one of the most pervasive features of the language of the Diplomatic War discourse is its constant appeal to identity. The discourse is characterized by a diverse set of representations of the North Korean Self and its relevant Other(s), thereby establishing the identities of the “primary characters” (Jackson, 2005a: 59) of the Diplomatic War and in the process essentializing 'North Korean-ness' as the binary opposite of 'U.S.-ness.' However, the discourse of the Diplomatic War goes further than simply drawing a boundary between Self and Other; it itemizes the character of each realm by clearly demarking good and evil, right and wrong, moral and immoral. This is what Campbell (1998: 73) refers to when he states that the construction of social space often results in a conception of divergent moral spaces:

“the social space of inside/outside is both made possible by and helps constitute a moral space of superior/inferior, which can be animated in terms of any number of figurations of higher/lower.”

While there certainly are far too many constructions of identity contained in the Diplomatic War to be listed here, some of the most common and crucial constructions are discussed in the following.

3.2 1 Constructing the U.S. Other

The realm of foreign policy, and particularly the construction of foreign adversaries, is critical for maintaining the boundaries between inside and outside, foreign/domestic, Self/Other and is thus significant for the “writing” of identity. It is therefore hardly surprising to find that the discourse of Diplomatic War is to a large degree constructed in an epideictic rhetorical mode, rather than a deliberative mode, as the very concept of the political Self is based on the identification of the “enemy.” The U.S., in this sense, is North Korea’s ‘enabling Other’ in the Diplomatic War discourse, its negative justification. Deeply embedded in North Korea’s rhetorical and discursive traditions, this language essentializes the U.S. as an Other by constructing it as an enemy, as evil and as foreign, but also as inhumane, morally corrupt and sick⁴

Perhaps the most notable feature of the construction of identity in the discourse is the ubiquitous use of a rhetorical trope of “friend vs. enemy,” “good vs. evil” and the subsequent representation of the U.S. as the “sworn enemy of the Korean people” (e.g. KCNA, January 24, 2013), the North’s “eternal enemy” with which the people of the DPRK “cannot live under the same sky” (e.g. Ch’ŏima, 9-2006: 34) or as an “enemy of peace and reunification” (Withdrawal of US Troops from South Korea 2008: 89), an “empire of evil” [악의 제국] (e.g. Rodong Sinmun, February 14, 2002, KCNA, October 29, 2004), a country ruled by “evil politicians” who pursue a “policy of evil against the Korean nation” (KCNA, February 14, 2003)⁵.

This language fulfills a number of important political functions. First of all, it moralizes the conflict with the U.S., transforming it from a political conflict (e.g. over particular policies) into a basic Manichean struggle of good vs. evil. This is an “act of demagoguery” (Jackson, 2005c: 10) that factually de-contextualizes and de-historicizes the actions of the U.S., emptying it of any political content, while simultaneously attributing a set of particular qualities. It is in this sense that the language of evil is an important part of the representational project in which the boundaries between the Self and Other are clearly delineated and the nature and quality of the Self as a force of good and the U.S. Other as a force of evil is (re-)affirmed. In a way, the language of evil “removes the need for self-

⁴ These are typical ‘identity markers,’ deployed largely for a domestic audience, that allow for an easy identification through the use of deeply entrenched, historically contingent and immensely powerful dichotomies of friend vs. foe, good vs. evil, moral vs. immoral, healthy vs. sick, purity vs. dirt.

⁵ It is important to note, however, is that within the discourse of the Diplomatic War, these constructions are not depicted as being inherent to the citizens of the U.S., but are limited to the political class in Washington. Evil is constructed as a result of the nature of those representing an evil regime.

reflection and the assessment of context and contributory circumstances” (Jackson, 2005a: 70). At the same time, using this language immediately suggests and facilitates certain behaviors vis-à-vis the Other while negating others. The language of evil provides a space to justify virtually any action against this evil – and at the same time to silence any (possible) dissent. Ultimately, there can be only limited compromise with evil and the most adequate response is to unify and fight against this evil.

Besides the designation as an evil enemy, the discourse also goes on to write the U.S. as fundamentally “alien” and “foreign.” Arguably more so than in any other country, the depiction of ‘the foreign’ in North Korean texts is an inherent expression of “otherness,” for it is intrinsically linked to the representation of the outside (Jackson, 2005a: 70)⁶. This construction of foreignness is vividly expressed by the notion of *oese*. While the term, literally translated, simply means ‘foreign power’, its highly negative connotation in the DPRK results precisely from the intimate association of the ‘foreign’ with discourses of danger and Otherness in North Korea⁷. The notion of ‘foreign’ in the Diplomatic War discourse can therefore not be conceived as a neutral category because of its intimate relations to difference and otherness. As Michael Shapiro (quoted in: Dalby, 1988: 419) has observed:

“The making of the Other as something foreign is (...) not an innocent exercise in differentiation. It is clearly linked to how the self is understood. A self construed with a security-related identity leads to the construction of Otherness on the axis of threats or lack of threats to that security, while a self identified as one engaged in “crisis management” (...) will create modes of Otherness on a ruly versus unruly axis”.

In an extension of constructing the Other as an enemy, as evil and foreign, the U.S. is also scripted as inhuman/non-human and as sick and dirty. These are vivid examples of the use of the body politic (e.g. Harvey, 2007), which can be easily observed in numerous representations concerned with threats to the order of the

⁶ For instance, the concept of *Chuch’e* as the ideological expression of self-reliance is placed in direct opposition to the influence of foreign ideas and foreign ways; the acquisition of foreign capital is said to be the way to national ruin while self-reliance is the only way to survival; while independence, according to the texts, is realized if man maintains his position as the master of state and society, it comes to be trampled upon if he is deprived of this position at the hands of foreign forces.

⁷ For example, a 2004 dictionary published in North Korea (*Chosŏnmal sajŏn*) directly links *oese* with the term *ŭijon*, or dependence, explaining that the *chajusŏng* and the *minjŏk* are under constant threat by foreign forces, thus only making them ‘serving the great’ [*sadaejjuŭi*].

DPRK's society. As these discursive constructions draw upon representations of the political in terms of the body, it immediately instantiates the moral space of identity. In these discursive constructions, the identity of the U.S. Other is described by the use of animalistic analogies, a 'language of disease' or medical metaphors. For instance, the texts repeatedly accuse the U.S. of conducting a "dirty war of aggression" (e.g. KCNA, November 7, 2003) in order to "meet its dirty political aims" (KCNA, January 25, 2007). In other examples, U.S. imperialism is described as "a cancer on the human condition" and Washington is accused of spreading the "cancer of imperialism" or the "poison of democracy." The rendering of the U.S. Other as sick, dirty, and a risk to the healthy socio-political organism of the Self produces a powerful medical bipolarity to which everyone can relate, and the operation of the healthy/sick, normal/pathological bipolarity as a politically regulative ideal thus derives its authority from its medical origins – it is an understanding effected by a social and cultural logic.

Again, such discursive constructions of identity are designed for very specific political purposes. Above all, this language authorizes and empowers the representation of danger through the metaphor of the social body (i.e. the socio-political organism as a whole) in terms associated with the representation of danger to the physiological body. Describing the Other as inhumane and/or sick ultimately contributes to a representation of the U.S.' representatives as undeserving of any sympathy. In that sense, the designation of the U.S. as 'inhumane/sick' Other is an expression of "otherness" that not only disqualifies the U.S. from the domain of the community of the North Korean Self, but ultimately disqualifies it from the realm of morality altogether. This is extremely liberating for the North Korean government, as any actions towards the U.S. in extension cannot be judged on moral terms.

3.2.2 Constructing the North Korean Self

Simultaneously to the U.S. Other, the discourse of the Diplomatic War constructs the North Korean Self as basically the polar opposite of the U.S., the force of good (as opposed to the force of evil). The following quote is a vivid example of the construction of the Self in the discourse.

"Our Party has preserved and steadily developed the fine traits of our people (...). Our Party's policy for preserving and developing the national character won active support from the people and displayed great vitality in deepening the people's trust in the Party and planting socialism deep among the people. Our Party made the national character a major basis of national unity. To love their nation and value their national character is a common psychology of the members of the nation and it is of great importance in uniting and rallying the whole nation. From the early days of the revolutionary struggle, the true Korean communists

attached great importance to the national character and worked hard to achieve the unity of the people in all walks of life [...].” (Kim, J.I. 1997a)

There are a number of important features to this language. Above all, the text speaks directly to the North Korean people and aims at affirming unity and collective identity by emphasizing that it is ‘our’ party and ‘our’ people valuing ‘their’ nation and unique national character. Linked to this is the fixing of the moral qualities and traits of the North Korean state and nation and its people. For instance, Kim Jong Il (1997b: 446) is quoted saying that

“Our nation is a morally lofty nation. Our nation has a strong sense of justice, loves the truth, and is polite and modest. Our nation has never invaded other countries throughout our history, and never given harm to other nations.”

Such claims to morality are clearly used to strengthen the loyalty of the people vis-à-vis the North Korean leadership and thus to sustain national unity by emphasizing the significance of the integral whole between leadership, the party, the army and the people, expressed in North Korea by the notion of *llsim tan’gyŏ* or single-hearted unity.

“In our country, everyone regards and supports the leader as they would their own father. They trust and follow the Party, regarding its embrace as that of their own mother. The leader, the Party and the people form one socio-political organism, and share the same destiny. The whole of society overflows with communist morality.” (Kim, J.I. 1994)

The Diplomatic War, it becomes clear, constructs a bipolar ‘reality’ of clearly demarcated characters: where the U.S. is depicted as hateful and cowardly, North Korean society is said to be loving, brave and heroic; where the U.S. society and political class are said to be split and segregated, North Korea is said to be united. This amplification is necessary to inscribe the essential qualities of insiders and outsiders, depicted in terms of simple opposites between the good vs. the bad, which can be found not only in the realm of cultural production, but basically every foreign policy discourse as well.

Beyond these rather broad figurations of North Korea’s national character in the post-Cold War era, the Diplomatic War discourse contains a number of significant discursive constructions of the Self. They are important not only because they occur most frequently in the examined discourse and are themselves linked to a number of deeply embedded political and cultural narratives, but because they are regularly drawn on to explain and legitimize contemporary foreign policy decisions and practices. Two particularly important constructions are discussed

here, i.e. the representation of the DPRK as the 'bastion of revolution' and the evolving construction of a 'nuclear state.'

The Diplomatic War discourse depicts the DPRK as a 'bastion of revolution,' a discursive construction that is closely linked to North Korea's re-definition of its own status in the post-Cold War era. As is exemplarily stated in the book "Understanding Sŏn'gun Politics:"

"The flag of socialism was taken down in the former Soviet Union and eastern European countries. In the broader international sphere, people who long for socialism are thrown into confusion and left with no guidance. During this time of great trial, we refused to make any change. Instead, we raised our flag of socialism even higher than before. This way, our country became the only remaining bastion of socialism and was illuminated with the esteemed honor of doing so" (Chun, 2004: 7, translation from: Kwon and Chung, 2012: 77).

This rendering of the Self as a special state and nation in the post-Cold War order is inherently linked to and dependent on the existence the external conflict with the U.S.

"Judging the situation that had changed in its favour in the early 1990s as a golden opportunity to attain its objective, the United States tightened the ring of political isolation and economic blockade of the north of Korea. It increased military pressure on the north, which alone was holding high the Red socialist flag." (Kim, C.U. 2002: 8-9)

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It is the conflict with the last remaining superpower that makes the Diplomatic War a conflict of international importance with global implications, as the international balance of power after the end of the Cold War was now

"characterized (...) by the confrontation between north Korea and the United States, which involves the question of war and peace not only on the Korean peninsula, but in the whole world, including the question of human destiny." (Kim, C.U. 2008: 34-35)

This rendering culminates in the seemingly bizarre interpretation that the end of the Cold War has led to a shift in the global political order in that the "formation centered on the Soviet-US confrontation changed to one that is based on the contest of power between North Korea and the United States" (Chun, 2004: 15, quoted in: Kwon and Chung, 2012: 76). While the assertion that North Korea is the only existing revolutionary country to confront the U.S. "may sound astonishingly self-centered and like gross exaggerations of North Korea's power" (Kwon and

Chung, 2012: 76-77) – just as the argument that the confrontation between the U.S. and North Korea became the central stage of the global conflict between imperialism and anti-imperialism that substituted the bipolar conflict between the U.S. and the Soviet Union – these modes of representation are based on and the result of a specific interpretation of P'yŏngyang's altered representation of its own place and role in the post-Cold War world order, which gave rise to a state identity as the 'last reservoir of socialism' (Park, 2000: 144). This construction not only furthers the perception of the DPRK as an exceptional entity, but it simultaneously provides the North Korean people with a sense of mission for the North Korean society and history, a sense of pride and self-esteem which in turn allows for a greater emotional involvement and a more effective socialization.

In parallel with the construction of an identity as an exceptional state, the Diplomatic War discourse also constructs an identity of the DPRK as a nuclear weapons state. This is an identity trait that is still in the process of being explored (see: Ballbach, 2015b). Ultimately, it was only in February 2005 that the DPRK government publicly claimed for the first time to possess nuclear weapons, although it had since 2003 talked frequently about the necessity to develop "strong military defense power" or "military deterrence power." In fact, ever since the nuclear crisis led to an international crisis in the early 1990s, North Korea consistently denied to develop or even aim at developing nuclear weapons, instead explaining the motives of its nuclear endeavors solely in terms of its energy needs. North Korea's exploration of a nuclear state identity thus only begun in earnest from 2005 onwards and particularly since the first nuclear test in October 2006. Following the first nuclear test, North Korea initially aimed to portray itself as a responsible nuclear power, whose nuclear status would not be a threat to others, but a contribution to peace on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia. "The U.S. nukes presage disaster but the Korean people's nukes promise peace and happiness," one of the emblematic posters reads. Hence, the DPRK attempted to project an image of the DPRK as a responsible, legitimate nuclear weapons state armed with these weapons solely for deterrence against external, especially U.S., nuclear or non-nuclear attack. As Hayes and Bruce (2011) rightly point out, this is the essence of North Korea's first "Nuclear Posture" statement issued in April 2010. Internally – that is, with regard to intra-DPRK domestic and inter-Korean constituencies – the DPRK portrays its hard-won nuclear weapons status as driven by the U.S. military (but also cultural) threat and a possible victimization by great powers – and as sufficient to force the great powers and the ROK to adjust their stance towards it due to its nuclear strength (Ibid.). As the nuclear state identity was further explored, the texts increasingly emphasized the DPRK's exceptionality and individuality among the world's nuclear powers. While the DPRK still emphasizes the notion of a 'responsible' state that is armed with nuclear weapons only for deterrence, this responsibility was now fully decoupled

from any external recognition of its nuclear weapons status and thus any legal frameworks governing nuclear weapons. As Hayes and Bruce (2011) aptly observed, the DPRK has attributed to itself a self-declared nuclear outlaw status. As a DPRK Foreign Ministry spokesman has put it: “The DPRK does not want anybody to recognize it as a nuclear weapons state nor feels any need to be done so. It is just satisfied with the pride and self-esteem that it is capable of reliably defending the sovereignty of the country and the security of the nation with its own nuclear weapons.” (Pyongyang Korean Central Broadcasting Station, May 24, 2010, quoted in: Hayes and Bruce 2011). This mode of representation emerged just as North Korea’s nuclear status became inherently linked to the legacy of Kim Jong Il. As Kim Jong Un is quoted saying: “It was Kim Jong Il who gave us the pride of nuclear weapons” (Rodong Sinmun, April 24, 2013). Judging from these constructions it seems highly questionable that North Korea would agree to fully reverse its status nuclear weapons state, as this would also question the legacy of Kim Jong Il.

3.3. The Construction of Threat in the Diplomatic War Discourse

Within international politics, discourses of insecurity are important. Discursive constructions of (in-)security are integral parts of the articulations of identity, whereby (in-)security is taken to mean that the boundaries which it constitutes are also the point from which identity is constituted (Bormann, 2008: 3). ‘Discourses of danger’ (Campbell, 1998) thus render possible discourses of the state, they provide it with a set of apparent ‘truths’ about “who and what ‘we’ are by highlighting who or what ‘we’ are not, and what ‘we’ have to fear,” often framing distinctive national guidelines regarding the state’s appropriate foreign policies (Campbell, 1998: 48). According to Campbell, the boundaries of a state’s identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy, and by the (re)inscription of boundaries (re)constitutes identity, demarcating inside/outside, self/other, domestic/foreign (Campbell, 1998: 3, 9). However, as the amount of dangers that exists in any society is almost infinite, it is only those dangers and threats that are interpreted as such that a society ‘learns to fear’. Danger, as Campbell (1998: 2) famously stated, “is not an objective condition; it is not a thing that exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat.” Instead, danger results “from the calculations of a threat that objectifies events, disciplines relations, and sequesters an ideal of the identity of the people said to be at risk” (Campbell, 1998: 3). As there is no other way of understanding and perceiving something or someone as dangerous unless it is interpreted as such within the discursive realm that inscribes meaning to it, the naming of danger naturally involves an interpretative task (Campbell, 1998: 1, 2). Hence, for North Korean state officials to actually incorporate some dangers into the security agenda and leave other dangers aside is a deliberate political decision. North Korea’s foreign

and security discourses thus do not just designate or identify a pre-existing threat for the Self against which the state protects it; by naming something as a danger, these foreign and security discourses co-constitute and re-create the threat in itself, and they inform governmental practices and actions accordingly. At the same time while certain dangers are presented to the population, these discourses simultaneously “offer the state as the appropriate solution to deal with this uncertainty” (Alvarez, 2006: 75). Representations of danger thereby turn into a necessary tool of the state to maintain its legitimacy and justify both its own existence and the political practices that are undertaken in the name of countering the threat(s) and securing the society. In this logic, the articulation of danger through foreign policy is therefore not seen as a threat to the state’s existence, but as the condition of possibility for the state’s identity (Campbell, 1998: 12, 13).

By now it has already become clear that the scripting of threat and danger is another ubiquitous feature of the discourse of the Diplomatic War, one that is closely related to the constructions of identity discussed above. The Diplomatic War discourse is interspersed with constructions of threats and dangers and the ‘new reality’ of the post-Cold War era is interpreted as one that is no less dangerous, in fact even more dangerous than before. Within the confines of this representation, the U.S. – defined as the primary enemy of the DPRK – is depicted as the greatest threat to North Korea in the post-Cold War era. Regular statements published in various North Korean official organs argue that the U.S. would aim “to squeeze our Republic to death,” and that “[a]mid the vortex of endless war [the North Korean] people have never once enjoyed a peaceful life” or that “[the U.S.] have made us a target for preemptive nuclear attack and applied the whole gamut of threats and blackmail” (e.g. Rodong Sinmun, April 24, 2013) and are just a few of many exemplary testimonies to this fact. While such historically contingent representations of the U.S. as a military threat continue to be vital, the Diplomatic War discourse also encompasses a set of ‘new threats’ linked to the U.S. (such as the threat of democracy, globalization or cultural infiltration) and which the practices of the Diplomatic War are then supposed to counter.

In this context, Sonia Ryang (2012) raises the intriguing question how it is possible that the perception of the “threatening U.S.” remains so powerful in North Korea in the post-Cold War era, even though there were no direct military clashes between the two countries during that period of time? This question is all the more significant considering the fact that there were and still are many other and arguably much more immediate dangers confronting the DPRK, as is not least reflected by the dramatic famine in the mid-1990s and the systemic economic crisis. An important part of the answer to that puzzle certainly rests in the actual history of the relation between the U.S. and North Korea – and the very real dan-

gers and violence that were part of this relationship, from the Korean War to the 1994 crisis that nearly escalated into a military conflict. However, while such 'real' dangers and threats involved in North Korea-U.S. relations cannot and should not be denied, they are only a part of the answer. Equally important is the fact that historically contingent 'discourses of danger,' i.e. the intentional construction and institutionalization of public threats and anxieties – continue to surround virtually all state-sponsored rhetoric about the U.S. As dangers do not exist objectively, independent of perception, what is regarded as 'U.S. threat' is a result of interpretation – and what is interpreted as posing a threat may not always match the realities of the actual risk of harm. As such, while the "nuclear project" as the main project of North Korean security in the post-Cold War era is an exercise to protect North Korea from a danger that killed no North Korean people in the post-Cold War era, it nonetheless has the whole of North Korea caught up in the 'national struggle' against U.S. imperialism. This clearly speaks to the central place of threat in contemporary North Korean state identity.

There are several reasons why this construction of threat is politically important for those in power in the DPRK. Above all, danger is scripted for the purpose of producing boundaries and writing North Korean identity and thus impose unity domestically, to provoke anxiety in order to maintain order and de-legitimize any possible dissent, to elevate the status of security actors in the military-first era, to provide the North Korean authorities with the resources and the legitimacy to divert scarce resources to particular ideologically driven projects or national efforts (such as the nuclear program) or to distract the public from more complex and pressing social problems such as the economic and social crises (Ballbach 2015a). It is very possible that the massive efforts and expenditures that are necessary for the practices of the Diplomatic War (particularly the nuclear strive) would be impossible to sustain without the overwhelming 'reality' of the U.S. threat. The Diplomatic War discourse is thus one of the discourses that serve the purpose of scripting the dangers that the DPRK is supposedly facing in the post-Cold War era and which have been integral in constituting and disciplining North Korean post-Cold War state identity as practiced through its domestic and foreign policy. This means that the discursive construction of identity in the Diplomatic War discourse is closely linked to what it designates as threatening to the Self. The discursive construction of U.S. threat, in other words, co-constitutes the practices of the Diplomatic War and makes them appear reasonable and appropriate. In this sense, threats and dangers are both indispensable and functional to North Korea's political life (Jackson, 2005b: 156). Jean Delumeau's argument that while danger certainly can be and indeed often is experienced negatively, it may also be a creative force, "a call into being" that provides access to the world" (quoted in: Campbell, 1998: 80) seems to hold particularly true for North Korea. The texts' persistent exhortations against living in fear along with the elevated

threat level promoted within the discourse reminds of what Campbell has termed the “evangelism of fear” (Campbell, 1998: 49). This is where the ‘security project’ of the North Korean state utilizes anxiety as an end as well as a means, in the same way that the mediaeval Church utilized anxiety as an end and a means towards its “salvation project” (Campbell, 1998: 13). It is the continued fostering of anxiety itself that becomes instrumental to the organization of political and social relations in the state’s project of security. This finding has important political ramifications, as it raises the question of how we can actually negotiate away a threat with a country that deems this threat vital to its very being?

4. Instead of Conclusions

This chapter analyzed North Korea’s most crucial foreign policy discourse in the post-Cold War era: the discourse of the Diplomatic War, through which North Korea’s nuclear program comes into effect and is potentiated as an acceptable and appropriate measure for defending the threatened Self against specifically identified Other(s) – primarily the U.S. It was shown that the language of the discourse and the inherent constructions of identities and threats are closely connected to tangible political functions: Firstly, the discourse offers distinct interpretations of the central contents and issues such as the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union and, above all, North Korea’s conflictual relations to the U.S. in the context of the nuclear issue. Against this thematic background, the discourse secondly constructs the identities of and the boundaries between Self and Other. By constructing the Self as inherently good and moral, as righteous and threatened and subsequently differentiating the Self from a foreign, evil, amoral and threatening U.S. Other, the conflict with the U.S. over the DPRK’s nuclear program was transformed from a mere political conflict to a fundamental and moral struggle between the forces of good against the forces of evil. A third crucial function of the Diplomatic War discourse is the construction of an imminent threat to the Self that is linked to the U.S. Other. The facilitation of threats and dangers not only promotes collective identity, but also allows for detracting the public from other, potentially more pressing (internal) problems and challenges, while also contributing immensely to the legitimization of the DPRK’s own policies.

Certainly, any discussion of political discourses in North Korea must address the sources of their power. A main factor beyond the level of the discourse itself addressed thus far, a second factor that contributed to the success of the Diplomatic War is its hegemony. In the authoritarian state structure of the DPRK, the

language, assumptions and perspectives of political discourses such as the Diplomatic War became the only acceptable narrative. While no discourse can ever be fully hegemonic or totalizing, it is safe to say that political discourses in North Korea come very close. This is because the language and the assumptions contained in these discourses are institutionalized in the operations and practices of all relevant political and social institutions. In this regard, the texts and practices of political discourses such as the Diplomatic War are firmly embedded into pieces of legislation, policy documents, and media reporting. Arguably nothing illustrates this institutionalization of the Diplomatic War more appropriately than the 2012 inclusion of the DPRK's (self-proclaimed) nuclear weapons status into the amended constitution. Once the standard narratives of the Diplomatic War were established by the decision-makers in P'yŏngyang, the language and assumptions of the discourse became a normal part of daily practice, and they are then reproduced through institutional memory and the habits of everyday-life experiences (Jackson, 2005a: 161-162). This process is all the more powerful if, as is the case in North Korea, virtually all political and societal institutions adopt the official language of the discourse. The North Korean media or scholarly literature do not challenge official positions, but are merely distributors of the official policy line. As such, there are things that cannot be spoken and there is only one conclusion to be drawn by the consumers of the discourse. Clearly, from the view of P'yŏngyang this constitutes another measure of success of the Diplomatic War discourse, i.e. the extent to which it was able to marginalize and silence alternative narratives and discourses.

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