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Introduction: North Korea as Exception

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The Fall 2020 issue of *Situations: Cultural Studies in the Asian Context* gives the spotlight to five articles on topics related to the culture, politics, and technology of North Korea. North Korea, or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, remains the most closed and enigmatic of countries in the world today. In the international media, it is best known for its displays of military aggression and development of weapons of mass destruction. North Korea is also notorious for its human rights violations, which have been condemned by human rights organizations as being among the most severe in the world. In a report published in 2014, the UN condemned North Korea for its widespread human rights abuses, decrying the enormous scale of its crimes against humanity, such as the imposition of the death penalty for a wide range of offenses, labor camps where prisoners are brutalized and forced into starvation, and the practice of forcing abortions on women who have been repatriated from China.[1] While more recent news about North Korea has focused on the diplomatic overtures made by US President Donald Trump, there remain unresolved questions about the policies that North Korea intends to pursue under its current head of state, Kim Jong-un, who took over the position of Supreme Leader in 2011. Indeed, as David Kang reminds us, there is much about North Korea that does not make sense to outside observers. For example, it is unclear whether North Korea is "strong or weak."[2] The extent to which the state enjoys the support among its people remains a mystery, which in turn brings up the question of whether its aggressive and unpredictable behavior is aimed primarily at shoring up the support of its own citizens, rather than at achieving specific strategic objectives against its rivals and adversaries—South Korea, Japan, and the

US. Also puzzling is how so economically backward a country, where the standard of living is far lower than those of its neighbors in the region, can carry on without having to repress serious challenges to the powers that govern it.[3] In other words, North Korea does not appear to obey the doctrines and principles that have come to constitute a sort of common sense in the post-Cold War world: states cannot survive without providing opportunities for their people to prosper economically, democracy is the best—and thus most stable—type of government, and open societies are more successful than closed societies in coping with crises and unforeseen developments.

North Korea has been a riddle to the outside world for decades. The analyses of scholars and experts involve such a high degree of speculation that it is difficult to achieve any kind of solid consensus about the nature and goals of the North Korean regime. Debates can easily deteriorate into mutual accusations by rivals of each other's conclusions as mere projections of their preexisting political stances. But such acrimony is difficult to avoid given how North Korea has defied both predictions of the experts and the expectations of common sense. Long dismissed as the isolated haven of a defunct political ideology, North Korea is routinely portrayed in the Western as on the brink of collapse, with the media reporting as recently as April 2020 that Kim Jong-un had taken ill with COVID-19. But the impoverished and harshly authoritarian state has always managed somehow to soldier on.[4] Yet, the current time in which the central institutions and core beliefs of the liberal West have come under unprecedented challenge might well be a productive and even auspicious one to examine and study the North. For it is one thing to reflect on this isolated and secretive, desperately poor and harshly authoritarian nation when the West is triumphantly confident in its values, institutions, and way of life. It is a wholly different matter to grapple with the realities of this harsh, authoritarian regime, the ostensible holdover of a bygone age, when the liberal West has succumbed to a deep and wide-ranging loss of conviction and plunged into grave uncertainty about its prospects for the future. Today, we find that liberal democracy, which had been touted as the best political form for satisfying basic human aspirations, is now regarded

by increasing numbers of people as being incapable of reversing the worsening divide between the haves and have-nots, resolving deep-seated racial and religious conflicts, and restoring a shared set of values that alone can produce the trust that is vital to the functioning of major institutions. The Brexit referendum, the election of Donald Trump, and the rise of populist parties in Hungary, Poland, Austria, and elsewhere in Europe have exposed a profound dissatisfaction with the status quo, which has given the people the readiness to take a chance on untested and unknown candidates and policies. As Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin observe, there has been a "de-alignment" at work that has left the political systems of the liberal West in a "far more volatile, fragmented, and unpredictable" condition than at any other period in the "history of mass democracy."[5]

Indeed, it is startling to consider that in less than three decades, the widespread optimism regarding the "end of history," when many intellectuals concluded with the end of the Cold War that the US had created the best political and economic system, has given way to a pervasive sense of dread and futility.[6] It is no longer the case, as in the words of Slavoj Žižek, that those in the West can persist in the presumption that "the liberal-democratic capitalist global order is somehow the finally found 'natural' social regime."[7] From the vantage point of a West that has succumbed to a crisis of confidence and is undergoing changes that may well leave it transformed in fundamental ways, the questions that perennially come up in relation to North Korea appear in a wholly different light. For if Westerners remain puzzled at how a state as desperately impoverished and as harshly repressive as North Korea can continue to survive under conditions of tremendous hardship, North Koreans are likely to be baffled by the recent eruption of riots and of waves of vandalism in the United States, in which mobs have attacked, defaced, and destroyed monuments to the most revered leaders of the nation, such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, and Ulysses S. Grant. Of course, communist regimes have routinely, and often cynically, attacked the US for racism since the establishment of the Soviet Union, but the spectacle of rioters demolishing the defining emblems of the nation with little fear of

reprisal from the authorities must surely be bewildering to the citizens of a "theater state" in which rituals and pageants glorifying the founding family of the country, such as the mass Arirang spectacle involving more than one hundred thousand participants, are a central part of the state's efforts to secure its legitimacy in the eyes of the people.[8] What must add to their confusion is the fact that such disorder, which threatens to widen to a national scale, is taking place in the country that is the most wealthy and powerful in the world.

If the primary enigma of North Korea for outsiders has been the sources of its political order, which has enabled it to withstand economic isolation as well as a brutal famine, the West presently finds itself baffled by how the political stability it once took for granted now eludes it, especially after having made undeniable progress in the area of race relations and in building a pluralistic society that protects the rights of minorities, whether racial or sexual. It is easy for the West to notice the ubiquitous presence of propaganda in everyday life in North Korea, from the portraits of the Kim family that hang in public spaces as well as in people's homes, to the frequent parades where North Korean citizens are, in the words of Suk-Young Kim, "made to participate as performers" attesting to the health of the patriotic national body.[9] But a North Korean would surely find it shocking for a society, especially one as rich and influential as the United States, not only to refuse to inculcate a common set of values and beliefs among its citizens but also to encourage its people to attack as inhuman and immoral the traditions of the nation and the symbols of its founders. As B. R. Myers points out in his provocative and fruitful study, North Koreans are pressured by their state ideology to behave in a "childlike" and "spontaneous" way which serves to reinforce their identity as pure and innocent victims of the great powers.[10] But what recent events in the US demonstrate is that liberal freedom and capitalist affluence, in the absence of shared values, are inadequate defenses against the pathologies of mass politics. Indeed, it is possible for masses of people to act in "childlike" and "spontaneous" ways not with the aim of obeying the demands of totalitarian authority but rather with the goal of dismantling the essential institutions and legal structure of a society that has become for them hopelessly contaminated by racism

and bigotry. Furthermore, the unmasking and censure of the values and institutions of the West as virulently racist and morally depraved have become, in a stunning turn, the official ideology of the liberal elites in the West.

The breathtaking nature of the contradictions of an elite that attacks the values and belief systems in which it has been brought up is conveyed by the documentary *Bitter Lake*, in which a British art historian, as part of a project aimed at securing the support of Afghans for their Western-supported government, seeks to instruct a group of Afghan men and women in the worldview of Western liberalism. The art historian shows her confused audience an image of Marcel Duchamp's urinal, which caused a scandal when it was displayed in 1917, as a revolutionary artwork that illustrates the need to "fight against the system."[11] For British philosopher John Gray, the bizarre spectacle of treating Duchamp's radical deconstruction of the Western artistic tradition as the emblematic work of Western civilization to a puzzled group of Afghans reveals the "collective malady of western societies."[12] The West is no longer able to win over non-Western peoples to their values and worldview. Indeed, it no longer even wishes to do so, as the criticism and denunciation of Western values have become a mark of one's social and moral superiority. But the West has not given up on the hubristic project of remaking the world in its own image, which is that of a society where every individual is free to remake himself without the constraints of tradition or community. In other words, what the West now seeks to export is its own social dysfunction, its chronic state of disorder and strife. As Gray writes, the disastrous military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, in which the liberal West has signally failed to reestablish order, underscores the reality that the "defining project" of Western societies is that of "dismantling themselves," which all but ensures that order and security will not return to the aforementioned countries.[13] Thus, while a political identity centered on oneself and one's group as morally innocent victims can play a vital role in sustaining popular support for a brutal authoritarian state, as Myers argues in *The Cleanest Race*, such convictions can also drive a people to turn against their own traditions and institutions out of their desire

to be purified from the moral guilt of living in what they regard as a hopelessly oppressive and depraved society.

The cultural revolution that has unfolded in the West may strike many as shocking and unprecedented, although such developments were anticipated by such theorists and intellectuals as different as arch-traditionalist Philip Rieff and radical Jean Baudrillard, who may have little in common politically but who were both long dismissed as excessively pessimistic. Indeed, the idea that the liberal West has itself embarked on a radical and unprecedented social experiment since the 1960s is one that is easily forgotten when confronting regimes that deny their citizens the wide array of personal freedoms which those in the West have taken for granted as the defining features of a good society. Rieff, for his part, observes that the achievement of mass affluence in the US after the Second World War set in motion a cultural revolution that he regarded as more radical and profound than the communist revolution, which for him was more superficial because it focused on the economy. For this cultural revolution has at its core the destruction of all forms of hierarchy and distinction, which would serve to deprive the educated of the influence and authority they had previously exerted over the rest of society. The stunning irony of the situation is that it was the members of the elites themselves who were leading this revolution, which Rieff described as the "most elaborate act of suicide that Western intellectuals have ever staged."[14] Baudrillard likewise takes as his point of departure the affluent society, which in his view reduces human beings to the impotent status of "always receiving" from a "technical system of generalized exchange and general gratification."[15] In this system, we are reduced to the impotence of slaves, because we are "entitled to everything, like it or not," while being forbidden from giving back anything to the system, for to do so would presume that it is in our capacities to change the system.[16]

It must count as one of the more striking ironies of our time that while the affluence of the West has contributed to ideologies that seek to dismantle the guiding values and historical foundations of its civilization, the grim and desperate poverty of North Korea has led to changes in the isolated country that have given its citizens more latitude to pursue

their own interests while also changing the regime in fundamental ways. In *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-Totalitarian Politics*, Patrick McEachern makes the case that the severe challenges faced by North Korea in the 1990s led Kim Jong-il to create a more "divided political system," characterized by multiple centers of power, that proved successful in stabilizing the country in the aftermath of the death of his father, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the ordeal of a devastating famine.[17] That North Korea might emerge with a more "moderate" regime in the wake of the famine of 1994–98, in which 600,000 to 1 million excess deaths are estimated to have taken place in a population of 22 million, goes against the kinds of policies that would be predicted by Western models of totalitarianism.[18] One would have expected a crisis of such magnitude to strip an authoritarian regime of its legitimacy, resulting in a scenario in which the state gains a strong or overpowering incentive to become even more repressive in order to maintain its grip on power. Indeed, the terrifying manifestation of what Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life" in the form of a starving population could easily have prompted the North Korean regime to impose "total domination" for the sake of its survival.[19] Instead, the response of Kim Jong-il under the pressure of this dire predicament was to shift away from a "unified system" dominated by a single leader to one characterized by checks and balances.[20] The new system granted more power to the cabinet, military, and party as "peer organizations," over which Kim stands as an "absolute authority" without, however, exercising "absolute power."[21] Such a shift, McEachern reminds us, was a highly risky one, and while he agrees with the supporters of the "collapsist school" that the chance of collapse was quite high during this period, those convinced of the imminent failure of the North Korean regime make the mistake of seeing the situation through a "deterministic" lens.[22]

To persist in viewing North Korea through a deterministic perspective means losing sight of the power of political and cultural symbols to bind a collective, which becomes a less surprising development when we consider how divided the West has become over its own emblems of tradition and identity. For example, Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, in their study, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic*

Politics, focus on the role played by the official pageantry of the state in legitimating the succession of Kim Jong-il to the premiership as his father entered his final years. North Korea is the only country in the communist world to have permitted the son to take over from his father, and for Kwon and Chung, a shift in the commemorative practices of the regime was vital in securing the status of Kim Jong-il as the new head of state. The state moved to highlight the partisan warfare against the Japanese in Manchuria as part of this transition, whereby Kim Jong-suk, the mother of Kim Jong-il, emerged as a central icon.[23] Kwon and Chung's view that the North Korean regime was able thereby to give new life to a charismatic form of leadership stands in tension with the view of McEachern that Kim Jong-il handed over increased power and influence to technocrats, which would reinforce Max Weber's thesis that charismatic authority cannot serve as a durable form of leadership and must eventually give way to rational-bureaucratic authority. But Kwon and Chung provide an arresting account of how North Korea serves in unexpected ways as the exception to both the rules and expectations that characterize the theories produced in the West. Sometimes this status produces enigmas that they cannot answer, such as why the regime remained strangely "passive" as hunger and starvation grew worse.[24] But their point that charismatic authority is in essence "anti-economic" opens up a terrain for inquiry in which the unorthodox use of our theoretical models might prove more rewarding with respect to North Korea than adherence to existing schools of thought. Certainly, the great strength of *The Cleanest Race* by B. R. Myers is the flexibility with which he approaches his study of North Korean propaganda, so that he is able to arrive at the surprising and productive thesis that the "androgynous" and "hermaphroditic" qualities deliberately cultivated by Kim Il-sung have proven to be more effective in winning the support of the people than the traits of the traditional patriarch, which by contrast, would provoke revolt and resistance among the ruled.[25] Such counter-intuitive approaches enable us to break free of the deterministic horizons imposed by Western liberalism, horizons which have become exposed during the last decade as the mirror of a broken status quo.

Of the five articles making up the special section, three foci on film, while the others examine the autobiographies of North Korea refugees and the efforts by the regime to acquire computer technology. "Comrade Kim Goes Global: Refiguring North Korean Cinema in a Global Context" by Dong Hoon Kim addresses the efforts of the North Korean film industry to make films that would be successful with a global viewership. Kim starts off his article with an account of a workshop that took place in 2005, at which North Korean filmmakers spent six months in a hotel watching and discussing more than two hundred Hollywood films, both classics like *Gone with the Wind* and *Citizen Kane* and blockbusters like *Braveheart* and *Troy*. The objective of the workshop, during which all film production in North Korea was shut down, was to figure out the secrets to Hollywood's success—what it is about its films that have them so celebrated across national boundaries. Cracking the code of the dream factory, the North Koreans reckoned, would enable them to make films that could likewise resonate with international audiences. One of the results of the workshop was the feature, *A Schoolgirl's Diary* (2007), a highly personal story about a teenaged girl who is forced to endure various hardships at home and at school when her scientist father is forced to move to another part of the country to work on a project for the state. The film, which was a success with domestic audiences, won praise at international film festivals for its sensitive depiction of the struggles endured by its protagonist. But as Kim shows, *A Schoolgirl's Diary* was by no means the first attempt by the North Korean film industry to win success and recognition abroad. Tracing the evolution of North Korean cinema from the socialist reality film of the 1970s, in which the focus shifted toward the lives of common people and their problems, Kim reveals that even within the ideological limits within which these films were produced, the filmmakers were able to branch out into personal and intimate themes such as romance and marriage. Films like *A Schoolgirl's Diary* and its successor on the international stage, *Comrade Kim Goes Flying* (2012), which is about a coal miner who dreams of becoming a trapeze artist, do not in fact represent a sharp departure from earlier North Korean films. Rather, Kim shows the continuity these films have with earlier works that were aimed at rallying a domestic

audience, while also demonstrating how formal innovations as well as collaboration with Westerners made these films distinct from what came before.

Immanuel Kim's "Comedian Comedy: The Intertextuality of North Korean Film Culture" examines the genre of comedy in North Korea cinema, in particular, the self-referential version of the genre in which the performers allude to earlier routines and often appear in roles playing themselves. The "inside joke," Kim points out, creates a sort of extra-fictional world which is composed of the actors, the performers playing them, and the audience that is able to recognize the references evoked by the gag. Officially, the ideological service performed by comedy in North Korea is to depict how the foibles and faults of the everyday citizen arise from the persistence of backwards political attitudes, which are then fixed by the lessons offered by the Party. In this regard, comedy is taken to act as a medium of education, mocking the reactionary elements within the otherwise mostly enlightened socialist nation. But to ascribe an educational purpose to comedy clashes with the nature of the genre itself, so that whatever didactic message it seeks to relay increasingly becomes something artificial, a statement of orthodoxy tacked on at the end or a perfunctory gesture of giving thanks to the benevolence of the country's leader at the opening. The film *Our Meaningful Life* (1979) focuses on a visit to a film studio by a naïve elderly man, played by North Korea's leading comedian, Kim Se-yŏng, who proceeds to wreak havoc on the sets and production facilities because he cannot tell the difference between reality and the fantasy world of the cinema. He spits on a group of actors playing South Korean and American soldiers, and even attacks his own son, an actor playing the role of a villain, because he mistakes him for the oppressive landlord he knew in his youth. This protagonist is held up for ridicule not only because he fails to recognize North Korea's most famous actors, who play themselves in the movie, but also because he repeats in a direct and simpleminded manner the ideological messages required of all North Korean films. As Kim argues, the phenomenon of film fandom and the genre of comedy combine to produce an intertextual space that not only dissolves the distinctions between the fictional and extra-fictional worlds within the film but also

turns the enunciation of the proper ideological message into occasions for laughter.

"Reality Effects for a Dangerous Age" by Douglas Gabriel takes as its subject recent films about young people that have changed the image of North Korea for foreign viewers while also raising concerns within the isolated nation about the changing mores of the younger generation. He compares the feature film, *A Schoolgirl's Diary* (2007), which is one of the films discussed by Dong Hoon Kim, with the documentary, *Under the Sun* (2015), which is directed by the Russian filmmaker Vitaly Mansky and explores the life of an elementary school student as she prepares to join the children's organization of the Workers' Party. Joining the group is a major milestone in the life of a young person in North Korea. Both films have been praised by foreign critics and viewers for providing nuanced views of the lives of ordinary citizens in North Korea. The fictional teenager Su-ryŏn and the real-life child Ri Jin-mi lead lives that contain their share of frustration, disappointment, and discontent with their circumstances and surroundings. The North Koreans depicted in these films defy both the longstanding stereotype of a people brainwashed by a brutally repressive state and the image promoted by the North Korean state of a harmonious collective happy in the service of its leader and the Party. Gabriel makes adroit use of Roland Barthes' idea of "reality effects," those elements of a text that cannot be pinned down to an unambiguous meaning or a definite function, to emphasize how realistic depictions of everyday life, in which overt political and social commentary are absent, receive opposing interpretations from North Korean film critics and foreign audiences. He reveals how the faces of bored children forced to listen to a lengthy speech by a war veteran, or an absent-minded gaze that results in ink dripping on a piece of paper, become weighted with significance, leading foreign viewers to conclude that such scenes convey silent dissatisfaction with the regime and its ideology. For North Korean officials, by contrast, the problems of young people, such as anxiety over their social status and the wealth and resources possessed by their families, pose a challenge for the state; the younger generation, which has enjoyed conditions of relative comfort since birth, is having a difficult time accepting the founding ideals of

their country. But Gabriel reminds the reader that the uncertainty of the people's support for the North Korea state relayed by the films compels us to develop new models for analyzing a society that itself is going through changes that it most likely failed to anticipate.

Eun Ah Cho's contribution, "Speaking Mouth, Writing Hand," considers the composition process behind the best-selling memoirs by North Korean refugees. Books such as *The Girl with Seven Names* by Hyeonseo Lee and *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* by Yeonmi Park have won wide recognition and popular acclaim in the English-speaking world. These two books are the best-known of the eight memoirs that were published in English between 2012 and 2016. Cho points out that most of these works had not appeared previously in Korean, but instead were first published in English. The recognition that North Korean defectors have achieved in the West in many cases had little to do with the Korean publishing industry. The memoir of Shin Dong-hyuk, *Escape from Camp 14*, went on to become a best-seller in the English-speaking world, but Shin's first book, which he wrote in Korean, failed to make an impression with South Korean readers. Cho points out that the social marginalization often experienced by North Korean defectors in the South plays a role in pushing them towards publishing their memoirs in the West. But the method in which they compose their autobiographies is a collaborative one that involves what Cho emphasizes is a "symbiotic" relationship among the defector, her or his co-author, and often a translator who is able to shuttle between Korean and English. This type of writing Cho calls "vocal-writing," in which the time-bound element of speech plays a prominent role. These memoirs thus take shape not as the written reflections of the defector, but rather as spoken testimonies of his or her experiences relating to life in North Korea, which typically involve the ordeal of the famine, the crossing of the border into China, encounters with human traffickers, internment at work camps, and eventual escape.

The special section closes with Benoit Berthelier's account of the efforts undertaken by North Korea to acquire computer technology during the Cold War. "Computing in Our Style: Information Technology and Juche Ideology in Cold War North Korea" details the development of

computer technology in the country from beginnings that could only be described as harsh and unpromising. At the time of liberation, one of the world's largest factories was to be found in Hamhung, which had been built by the Japanese, but there were fewer than a dozen individuals in the North with a university degree in a scientific discipline. Nevertheless, the country made a concerted push to promote the study of the sciences and the development of technology, and within two decades North Koreans were able to build their own transistors, capacitators, and other parts necessary for electronics. Berthelier highlights the paradox of this initiative: the North Korean regime regarded the acquisition of advanced technology as indispensable to the political goal of achieving independence from the outside world, yet, lacking the capacity to manufacture its own computers, the country was obliged to purchase models developed abroad. The sources of North Korean computing technology, Berthelier reveals, were not the ones an outside observer would expect. Although many North Korean computer scientists were trained in the Soviet Union, the North Korean government turned to other countries for computer equipment, such as Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and East Germany. Notably, western European companies like the French-based Honeywell-Bull and West German Prakla-Seismos also sought to make deals with North Korea as they saw the country as free of competition from their major American and Japanese rivals like IBM or NEC. But the North Koreans were eager to make deals with European firms in order to reach a point at which they would no longer have to rely on outsiders for technology. Their overriding aim was not to gain access to computers that they believed was vital to the objective of making central planning rational, but rather to build their own factories to manufacture computers. The development by North Korea of the technological expertise to make its own computers, as Berthelier compellingly demonstrates, arises from its drive to subordinate the economic to the political. The achievement of such know-how has served as a source of optimism in hard times, while making computers an increasingly common aspect of everyday life in the North.

In her path-breaking study of North Korean theatre, Suk-Young Kim considers the possibility that there could be a fundamental shift

under way in the cultural imaginary of North Korea. Taking the film *A Schoolgirl's Diary* as her example, she argues that the depiction of the protagonist's father as "imperfect" and flawed leads not to disillusionment and the repudiation of Kim Il-sung and his dynasty, but instead towards a politics of reconciliation, in which the citizens "reconcile" themselves to a likewise "imperfect" national father.[26] Perhaps such flexibility and newfound openness will enable the regime to continue, or perhaps it will weaken it. It is impossible to predict of course whether the future might hold greater hardships or worse forms of repression for the people of North Korea, but what is likely is that the country will open itself up in often unexpected ways, just as it has done in studying Hollywood films carefully or in building computer factories. But scholarly interventions like the contributions in this issue of *Situations* will help us in recognizing the forces at work in a country that, like in more prosperous and familiar parts of the world, faces unprecedented challenges in the years to come.

Notes

[1] United Nations Human Rights Council, "Report of the Detailed Findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," A/HRC/25/CRP.1 (February 7, 2014), 262, 122, http://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/25/CRP.1.

[2] David Kang, "They Think They're Normal: Enduring Questions and New Research on North Korea—A Review Essay," *International Security* 36, no. 3 (Winter 2011/12): 143.

[3] Ibid., 144.

[4] See for example, Daniel Sneider, "Behind the Secret Plan for a North Korea Collapse," *Asia Times*, April 24, 2020, accessed August 13, 2020, https://asiatimes.com/2020/04/behind-the-secret-plan-for-a-north-korea-collapse/; Andrei Lankov, "N Korea: On the Verge of Collapse?," *Al Jazeera*, May 8, 2014, accessed August 13, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/05/n-korea-verge-collapse-2014585634725858.html; and Bonnie Glaser and Scott Snyder, "Is North Korea on the Verge of Collapse?," *Oilprice.com*, May 25, 2010, accessed August 13, 2020, https://oilprice.com/Geopolitics/Asia/Is-North-Korea-On-The-Verge-Of-Collapse.html.

[5] Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Pelican Press, 2018), xxiii.

[6] Francis Fukuyama, who is credited with the idea that the combination of liberal

democracy and capitalist markets is the best system for fulfilling human yearnings, was in fact rather pessimistic about the implications that such a discovery would have for the future of humankind. In his view, such a development placed a ceiling on the human capacity to imagine happiness and well-being. See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 46.

[7] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 301.

[8] Heonik Kwon and Byung-Ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 44–45.

[9] Suk-Young Kim, *Illusive Utopia: Theater, Film, and Everyday Performance in North Korea* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 59.

[10] B. R. Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters* (Brooklyn: Melville House, 2011), 96, 168.

[11] *Bitter Lake*, directed by Adam Curtis (2014; London: BBC).

[12] John Gray, “How the Liberal West is Dismantling Itself,” *Unherd*, November 7, 2018, accessed August 16, 2020, https://unherd.com/2018/11/how-duchamps-urinal-embodies-the-liberal-west/.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2006), 7.

[15] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2014), 102.

[16] Ibid., 102–3.

[17] Patrick McEachern, *Inside the Red Box: North Korea’s Totalitarian Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 34.

[18] Ibid., 239, 33. For the figures on the number of deaths due to starvation during the famine, see Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 76.

[19] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 120.

[20] McEachern, *Inside the Red Box*, 34.

[21] Ibid., 37.

[22] Ibid., 75.

[23] Kwon and Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*, 115.

[24] Ibid., 166.

[25] Myers, *The Cleanest Race*, 112.

[26] Kim, *Illusive Utopia*, 318.