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Explaining Depravity through the Looking Glass: Political Prison Camps, North Korea, and Waltz's Three Images

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EXPLAINING DEPRAVITY THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS: POLITICAL PRISON
CAMPS, NORTH KOREA, AND WALTZ'S THREE IMAGES

by

AMANDA BATTLES

(Under the Direction of Darin H. Van Tassell)

ABSTRACT

The political prison camps of North Korea are blatant violations of human rights within the state. They have recently received international attention within the United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Security Council. This paper examines these political prison camps through Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis in order to better understand the existence of these camps.

Keywords: Political prison camps, North Korea, levels of analysis, first image, second image, and third image.

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

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DEDICATION: The reason behind the work

In memory of my mom, Rhonda McGuire. Thank you for always believing that I have the potential to do whatever I set my mind to and for showing me what true perseverance looks like. I would have never had the confidence in myself to achieve anything if you had not instilled in me this drive and thirst for learning. You always expected more of me than I thought I could ever be capable of. Thank you for being a mom who always led by example. I hope this makes you proud. I love and miss you Mom. (7/8/59 – 1/7/15)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: We did it!

I would like to thank Dr. Darin Van Tassell for his support and encouragement through this process. His ability to know how and when to push me was truly what got me through this. I have also appreciated his creative flare for the writing process. It was never a dull moment in his office. Thank you to Dr. Barry Balleck for his suggestions and useful knowledge on the topic. His thorough knowledge has kept me in check when I wanted to simply write fluff. Thank you to Dr. Thomas Dolan for his passion and excitement that made this project so enjoyable. It has been exciting to hear of his experiences in North Korea to give me the extra boost of energy needed to complete such a long and tedious task. Outside of my committee, I would like to thank Mr. Wayne Ervin. He is the one who started this passion for international studies during my freshman year in high school. It was a once in a lifetime experience having him as a Model UN coach, especially with the Expo markers flying at my head. I would also like to thank my husband, without whom this would not have been possible. He has encouraged me through the whole process and at times dragged me into his classroom to make me work. I would not have been able to finish without his assistance. There are many others I could name who deserve recognition and praise for assisting me in my learning endeavors and to all those who go unlisted but played a part, thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: The what, why, and how

Seeking to use the logic of Kenneth Waltz to better understand the existence of political prison camps in North Korea.

“The chief interrogator shouted more questions...A tub full of burning charcoal was dragged beneath Shin. One of the interrogators used a bellows to stoke the coals. The winch lowered Shin toward the flames...Shin, crazed with pain, smelling his burning flesh, twisted away from the heat. One of the guards grabbed a gaff hook from the wall and pierced the boy in the lower abdomen, holding him over the fire until he lost consciousness.”¹

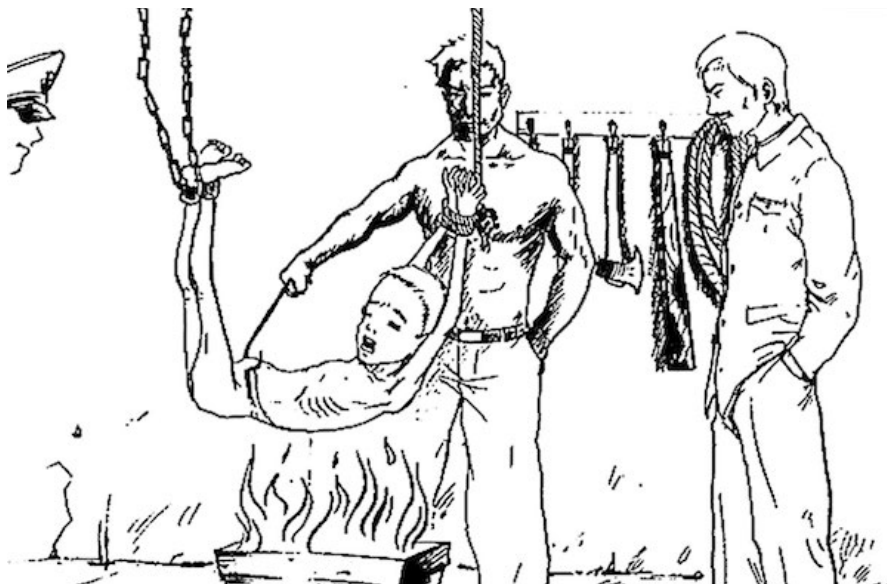


Figure 1- Shin Dong-hyuk tortured as a child in a political prison camp, Camp 14²

Shin Dong-hyuk was a child, born into a political prison camp due to violations committed by his family. For this reason, Shin lived through starvation, interrogation, and

¹ Harden 2012: 58

² Sichel 2014- This picture is a depiction of what Shin experienced when he was tortured. His body was placed over flames and his side was pierced while he was being burned. His arms and legs were bound in order to hold him over the flame and to prevent him from escaping.

torture. This violation to Shin's human rights was committed during interrogations about his family's actions inside the prison camp, as the North Korean government believed that Shin knew about why his mother and brother attempted to escape from the camp, ignoring the fact that Shin had been the one to report the attempted escape to the authorities in the prison camp. Shin, being unaware of any other information about the escape attempt, was seen as defying orders when Shin did not tell the guards more.³ As a result, Shin was tortured.⁴

According to Part 1, Article 1 of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment the international definition of torture includes:

any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.⁵

Under this definition of torture, those previously and presently residing within the political prison camps within North Korea experience torture daily.

³ On 18 January 2015, Mr. Shin came out with information that some of his story in *Escape from Camp 14* was not completely true. For instance, when Shin stated that his mother and brother were killed in Camp 14, they were actually killed in Camp 18. Also, he shared that he was burned and tortured in the political prison camp when he was 13 years-old when in fact he was 20 years-old. While these two facts do change the story told by Mr. Shin, for the purposes of this thesis it does not significantly alter the story being told. BBC News 2015

⁴ Harden 2012

⁵ The United Nations 1997: 1

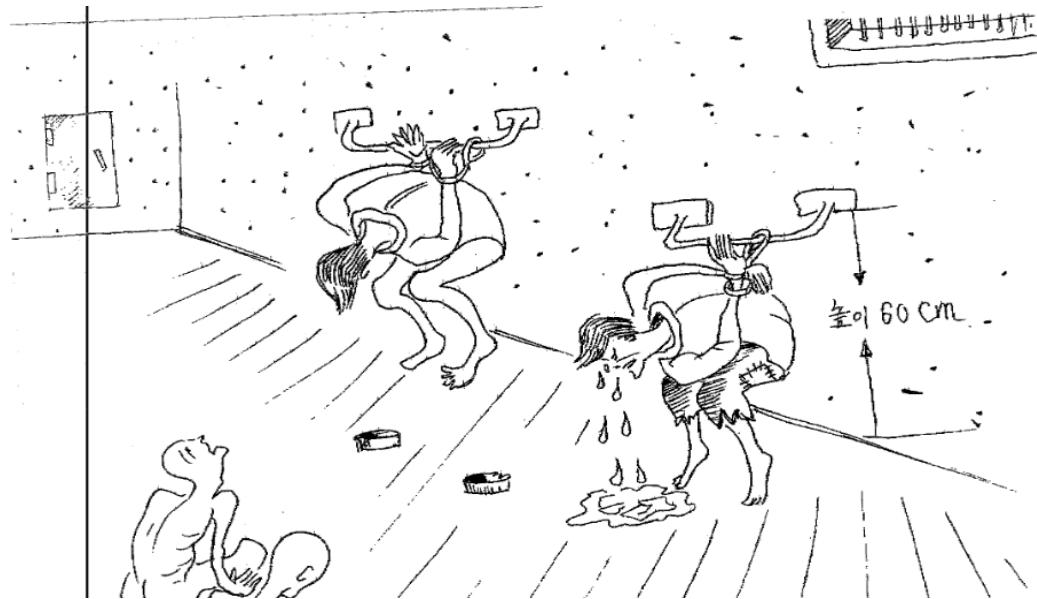


Figure 2-Torture technique used within North Korean political prison camps⁶



Figure 3- Another torture technique used within North Korean political prison camps⁷

⁶ Park 2014- This picture portrays one type of torture technique that is used in these camps. Political prisoners are forced to stand in contorted forms in order to cause excruciating pain to get them to confess to their crimes or to extract information.

⁷ Park 2014- In this picture, we see another form of torture within the prison camps. This torture is called pump torture. “After sitting, you stand about a hundred times.”

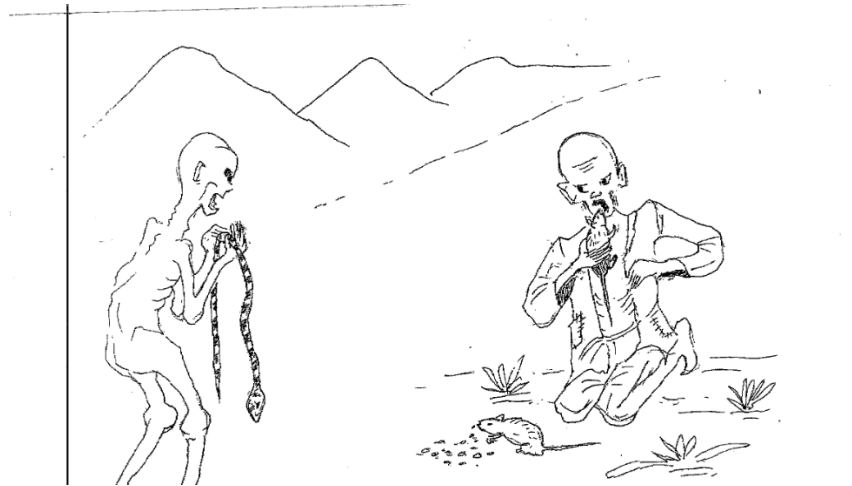


Figure 4- A representation of two North Koreans experiencing starvation. ⁸

"If we don't stand with men and women suffering in places like North Korea, then what do we stand for?" These words were spoken on 23 September 2014 by U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry, to a room of foreign officials in relation to the human rights abuses being perpetrated in North Korea through the use of political prison camps. Kerry continued, "We say to the North Korean government, all of us here today: you should close those camps. You should shut this evil system down."⁹ This thesis seeks to describe political prison camps and the lives of political prisoners. In order to accomplish this, this thesis must first define what a political prisoner looks like according to the international community.

According to the United Nations, a person can be classified as a political prisoner if:

1. the detention has been imposed solely because of their political, religious or other beliefs, as well as non-violent exercise of freedom of thought, conscience and religion, freedom of expression and information, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, and other rights and freedoms guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) or the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR);

⁸ Gover 2014- In this picture, we see what the starvation looks like within the political prison camps. The prisoners receive a form of corn meal to eat that is not enough for them to survive. This is why many within the prison camps die from starvation. In order to avoid this fate, many prisoners will eat snakes and mice in order to stay alive.

⁹ The Week 2014: 1

2. the detention has been imposed solely for activities aimed at defending human rights and fundamental freedoms;
3. the detention has been imposed solely on the basis of gender, race, colour, language, religion; national, ethnic, social or class origin; birth, nationality, sexual orientation and gender identity, property or other status, or on other basis, or due to their firm links with communities united on this basis.
4. the detention has been imposed in violation of the right to a fair trial, other rights and freedoms guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights or the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
5. the detention was based on falsification of evidence of the alleged offence, or imposed in the absence of the event or elements of the offence, or imposed in connection with an offence committed by another person;
6. the length of the detention or its conditions are clearly disproportionate (incommensurate) to the offence the person is suspected, accused or has been found guilty of;
7. the person has been detained in a discriminatory manner as compared to other persons.¹⁰

These internationally accepted definitions assist in supporting the claim that Shin Dong-hyuk and those with stories similar to his are in fact considered political prisoners by the United Nations.

According to the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, the political prison camps of North Korea have also been found to be considered crimes against humanity.¹¹ According to the International Criminal Court, crimes against humanity are defined as:

including any of the following acts committed as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack: murder; extermination; enslavement; deportation or forcible transfer of population; imprisonment; torture; rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity; persecution against an identifiable group on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural, religious or gender grounds; enforced disappearance of persons; the crime of apartheid; and other inhumane acts of a similar character intentionally causing great suffering or serious bodily or mental injury.¹²

¹⁰ Human Rights House 2014: 2-3

¹¹ Watch 2014

¹² International Criminal Court 1998: 1

Not surprisingly, the United Nations has been notified that many of these criteria of crimes against humanity have occurred in the political prison camps of North Korea.¹³ This supports the idea that Shin was a political prisoner being tortured in a way that is constituted as crimes against humanity.

With North Korea maintaining closely guarded closed borders to outsiders, especially in regards to its political prison camps, it is nearly impossible for the United Nations to have first-hand knowledge of the events occurring in the camps. For this reason, the academic study of North Korean prison camps is severely limited. To understand the emergence of political prison camps in North Korea becomes even more of a challenge, given that individual prisoners seldom are released back into society. Moreover, these camps are only visible through satellite images and the events are only known due to stories told by the few who have escaped the camps or the family of victims who have fled the country. These stories are subjective to the individual's experiences and damage the supporting arguments being made about the exact experiences within the political prison camps of North Korea.

I assert that even with these biases existing within this thesis, the story still merits being told. This assumption is supported by the United Nations. On 18 December 2014, the United Nations General Assembly voted to refer North Korea to the International Criminal Court. This resolution will be brought before the Security Council to pursue this referral. It is believed that once the Security Council debates this resolution, it will ultimately be vetoed by Chinese and Russian allies to North Korea.¹⁴

These political prison camps will be analyzed through the lens of Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis. The levels of analysis include the individual, the state, and the international system.

¹³ Council 2014

¹⁴ BBC News 2014

While there are different interpretations of these levels of analysis by Marx and Lenin that include class, this thesis intends to stay true to the three major levels. Kenneth Waltz created the theory of the levels of analysis in order to analyze specific events throughout history. These levels can breakdown difficult conflicts in order to assist the international community in its attempt to understand these events. Seeing that political prison camps are some of the most foreign and misunderstood aspects of international deviance, I support the idea that the levels of analysis will thoroughly explain the unthinkable.

In this thesis, I will first explain North Korea and its existence. One must understand what the expectations are of the State and its people before understanding the smaller section of the State in its penal system. The second thing to be discussed in this thesis will be the make-up of political prison camps within North Korea. This will be accomplished through the use of first-hand stories from former prisoners and prison guards. With the limited access to North Korea and the impossibility of seeing a prison camp first-hand, these stories will be the only glimpse into what the prison camps look like.

Once these camps are explained in detail, the existence of these camps will be analyzed according to the levels of analysis by Kenneth Waltz. I will first explain these camps according to the individual level of analysis. Understanding the Kim regime's need for these political prison camps can give the reader an unusual look into the creators of the system within North Korea. Second, I will explain political prison camps through the lens of the state. I will look into the exact mentality behind the citizens and important government officials permitting such occurrences to continue. Why have these citizens not rebelled against their government with such blatant violations of their most basic human rights? Finally, I will conclude by explaining political prison camps through the system level of analysis. The system will be analyzed by

focusing on examples of political prison camps outside of North Korea to support the theory that the camps in North Korea are perhaps also understood as a pattern of events that can be found at different places and at different times in the international system. These examples will be taken from Latin America, Europe, and Asia. I will support the assumption made by Kenneth Waltz that the system level of analysis is in fact the most effective lens to understanding international conflict. Finally, I will conclude this thesis by stating that while the system has the most significant lens to understand political prison camps within North Korea, our ability to observe the existence of the North Korean prison camps through each of Waltz's images is critical to understanding the multifaceted existence of these camps that appear to go against the most basic assumptions of humanity.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: So what are North Korean political prison camps?

The question that will be addressed in this thesis is a rather straightforward one: why do these political prison camps exist? Why would a state willingly permit and support places that engage in such dehumanizing practices? The evidence is overwhelming, indeed.

Human Rights Violations and Crimes against Humanity

On 21 March 2013, the United Nations published a Commission of Inquiry into the human rights abuses of North Korea. Their findings are disturbing to many and bring to light what has been hidden for so many decades: the government of North Korea violently mistreats its citizens without any international repercussions. While the violations outlined in this Commission are numerous, the research effort will focus almost entirely on the existence of the political prison camps. With the assistance of satellite systems, the Commission found that four political prison camps currently exist in the DPRK. The information on these political prison camps are “based on the body of testimony and information received, the...DPRK authorities have committed and are committing crimes against humanity in the political prison camps, including extermination, murder, enslavement, torture, imprisonment, rape and other grave sexual violence and persecution on political, religion and gender grounds.”¹⁵ These violations have become an international crisis. In order to come to the conclusions that the DPRK is currently in violation of the basic human rights of its people, the Commission utilized the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention on the Rights

¹⁵ Council 2014: 323

of the Child (CRC). The Commission found the DPRK to be in violation of Articles 6, 7, 9, 10, and 14 in the ICCPR, as well as Articles 6, 37, and 40 in the CRC. These articles include the right to life, freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, the right to liberty and security of the person, the right to human treatment of detainees, the right to a fair trial, and others.¹⁶

The Commission has found that basic human rights are not given to political prisoners so that the camps may instill discipline and order. For example, political prisoners will be denied food to the point of starvation. Prison guards are trained to use the reduction of food in order to punish and control prisoners. While the prison guards are using starvation for punishment purposes, they are fully aware of the detrimental effects that the lack of food is having on prisoners due to regular medical checks that are conducted in the camps. This food deprivation tactic is used throughout the state as a means of control. The higher *songbun* a family is at within the state, the better access that family has to food.¹⁷ While previously the state could claim that they were experiencing food shortages, that is no longer the case today. Discrimination and preferential treatment is followed in the distribution of food.

The United Nations General Assembly, in December 2014, recommended that the Security Council send the DPRK to the International Criminal Court on these counts of crimes against humanity.¹⁸ This request passed by a vote of 116 in favor, 20 against, and 53 abstaining. Due to the severity of the human rights abuses in the DPRK, the Security Council agreed to hear the case even in the face of opposition from China and the Russian Federation.¹⁹ North Korea responded by stating that the Security Council's involvement with the analysis of the human

¹⁶ Council 2014

¹⁷ *Songbun* is the state assigned social class system of the DPRK.

¹⁸ Al-Jazeera 2014

¹⁹ BBC News Asia 2014

rights abuses within North Korea was a “hostile policy pursued by the United States.” It then went on to threaten further nuclear testing due to this study of the abuses being perpetrated in North Korea.²⁰ The Minister for Foreign Affairs from the DPRK, Ri Su Yong, also sent a letter to the Secretary General which insisted that due to Shin Dong-hyuk’s admission to altering his story that the entire history told by Mr. Shin was falsified. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, I do not support that assumption. The letter also stated,

The initiators of the ‘resolution’, including the European Union and Japan, have colluded to forcibly adopt the ‘resolution’ by concocting frauds and falsehoods from the beginning and they have not interviewed even a single citizen of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea while doing so. I hope you will urge them to admit this fact by themselves and apologize for it to the international community.²¹

North Korea is attempting to fight back against what could be an embarrassing spectacle of a state that has been permitted to commit crimes against humanity and violate basic human rights. Kenneth Roth, the executive director of the Human Rights Watch stated, “Today, the Security Council signaled that Pyongyang’s decades-long regime of massive cruelty against its own people must end. By placing North Korea’s appalling human rights record on its agenda, the Council can now at any point take the next step of referring these crimes against humanity to the I.C.C.”²²

Sentencing

The United Nations, as well as other materials from the eyes of refugees and prison camp survivors such as *Escape from Camp 14*, documents the fact that people are placed within

²⁰ Sengupta 2014: 1

²¹ Yong 2015: 1

²² Sengupta 2014: 1

political prison camps for a host of reasons.²³ Moreover, the United Nations Commission of Inquiry documents that “persons found to have been in contact with officials or nationals from the Republic of Korea or with Christian churches may be forcibly ‘disappeared’ into political prison camps, imprisoned in ordinary prisons or even summarily executed.”²⁴ The Commission further states that many in the camps are not even aware of the crimes they have committed. Mr. Ahn Myong-chol, a former prison camp guard at four different North Korean prison camps, presents his experiences as a person of authority in these camps. “Mr. Ahn Myong-chol, testified that most inmates to whom he spoke during his long years of working as a political prison camp guard had no idea why they had been arrested.”²⁵ In *Escape from Camp 14*, the reader learns that the prisoners of these camps may not have even committed any violation at all. This book tells the reader that many citizens are residing -- and in the case of *Escape from Camp 14* -- born within these camps due to one family member displeasing the North Korean government.²⁶ According to the United Nations Commission, “it was common that the authorities sent entire families to political prison camps for political crimes committed by close relatives (including forebears, to the third generation) on the basis of the principle of guilt by association.” The Commission continues by explaining that the number of prisoners in these political prison camps have purposefully been eliminated through grotesque means which supports the idea that the North Korean people are moving away from large inmate numbers to a more violent punishment system.²⁷

²³ Harden 2012

²⁴ Council 2014: 144

²⁵ Council 2014: 209

²⁶ Harden 2012

²⁷ Council 2014: 270

Treatment of Prisoners

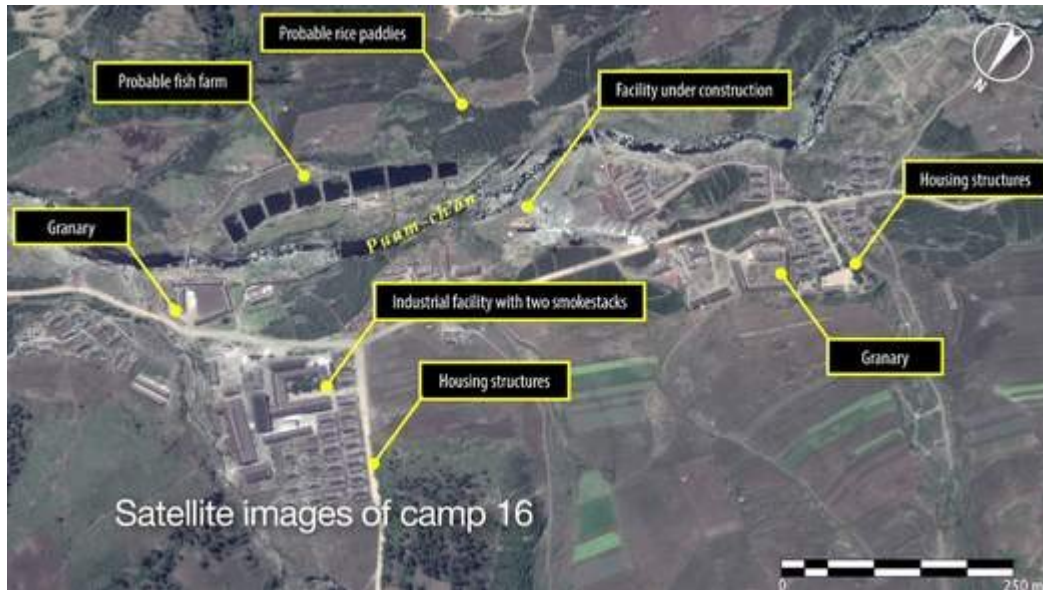
According to the 2015 World Report by the Human Rights Watch, while there have been meager changes to the human rights abuses of North Korea through the ratification of documents by North Korea, the human rights abuses still continue and more specifically within the political prison camps. “These camps are characterized by systematic abuses and often deadly conditions, including meager rations that lead to near-starvation, virtually no medical care, lack of proper housing and clothes, regular mistreatment including sexual assault and torture by guards, and executions.”²⁸ One prison guard from Camp 16 who has never spoken publicly before tells the story of “detainees being forced to dig their own graves and women being raped and then disappearing.”²⁹ These crimes are not experienced solely by the adults of the prison camps. Shin stated to a congregation in Seattle where he was speaking that he watching a teacher brutally beat a six-year-old to death in class “for hiding five grains of corn in her pocket.”³⁰ Shin continues by saying, “I didn’t think much about it. They educated us from birth so that we were not capable of normal human emotions.”³¹ While the international community is crying for an end to these political prison camps, we see below that they are in fact enlarging rather than shrinking which means that these human rights violations only look as if they are going to continue.

²⁸ Human Rights Watch 2015: 410

²⁹ Amnesty International 2013: 1

³⁰ Mirsky 2012: 28

³¹ Mirsky 2012: 29



*Figure 5: Expansion of political prison camps in North Korea*³²

Along with physical abuse by prison camp guards, the daily lives of these prisoners are dismal. The prisoners are forced to complete dangerous and difficult jobs from sunrise to sunset. These jobs include mining, logging, and agricultural jobs with insufficient tools and a lack of safety equipment. Due to these shortcomings, the job site death toll is extremely high.³³ Shin from *Escape from Camp 14* witnessed this first hand.

About sixty percent of Shin’s class was assigned to the coal mines, where accidental death from cave-ins, explosions, and gas poisonings was common. Many miners developed black lung disease after ten to fifteen years of working underground. Most miners died in their forties, if not before. As Shin understood it, an assignment in the mines was a death sentence.³⁴

Along with having to experience these dangerous and life threatening conditions, these prisoners are not recognized by the state.

³² Palmer 2013- This picture which originated from Amnesty International shows that these prison camps are expanding in size.

³³ Human Rights Watch 2015

³⁴ Harden 2012: 81

According to the 2015 Human Rights Watch World Report,

While a North Korean UN diplomat publicly acknowledged for the first time in October 2014 that ‘reform through labor’ centers exist in North Korea where ‘people are improved through their mentality and look on their wrongdoings,’ Pyongyang still refuses to admit that *kwan-li-so* camps operate in the country.³⁵

The North Korean government refuses to state before the international community that they are committing any acts of human rights violations to their citizens. It can be speculated that this is in order to preserve what they believe is their international reputation. The North Korean government could potentially fear that if the international community were made aware of the extent to which these camps are utilized and the type of treatment that is given to the prisoners that the world would continue to be puppeteered by the United States, which is the gravest fear of North Korea. The North Korean government cannot admit that they have committed any crimes, so they must portray it as an attempt to re-educate their citizenry much like what is done in developed states’ prison systems.

Emotions within the Camps

These political prison camps are not only violent and aggressive to the inmates; they also create a sense of aggression among the inmates themselves. With starvation and an inherent need for survival, prisoners will turn against each other including those in their own families. In *Escape from Camp 14*, the reader witnesses Shin and his father being brought to the gallows where executions frequently took place. “This was the place where Shin had witnessed two or three executions a year since he was a toddler.”³⁶ The reader comes to the realization that the immersion into aggression within the political prison camps begins at tender childhood ages. This immersion could be interpreted as the camp system’s attempt to train its inmates while their

³⁵ Human Rights Watch 2015: 2

³⁶ Harden 2012: 65

psyches are still fragile and easily malleable. This training could be why the reader sees what it does later in this selection. Shin and his father had been in interrogation for an untold amount of time when Shin had reported his mother and brother as potential escape risks. When they arrived at the gallows, they saw Shin's mother and brother being dragged out to the gallows. Then the fateful words came. A senior officer stated, "Execute Jang Hye Gyung and Shin He Geun, traitors of the people."³⁷ While Shin's father cried to the side, Shin felt no guilt for having sealed the fate of his mother and brother. When the guards put the noose around Shin's mother's neck, she met his gaze but Shin did not hold that gaze. A few moments later, she was hanged. Shin's feelings were expressed as "Shin thought she deserved to die".³⁸ When one hears these words, it is difficult to fathom. For a child to watch his mother and brother die with no remorse or sadness at not only their death but the culpability that Shin should have felt for turning them over to authorities is striking. This shows how indoctrinated these prisoners are in the ways and expectations of the prison camp guards. When the reader also sees how differently the father responds to the impending death of his wife and child, the reader can see the difference between a North Korean who remembers life outside of the camps and a child who has never seen or felt the love and empathy that is experienced outside of the camps. Even with the father's distraught expressions, he does not fight or rebel against the guards as one would see in other mistreatments and unethical interpretations of the law in other countries. There is no need to hold back the father or console him, not that one would see inmates consoling each other. One sees that the inmates do not have to fundamentally agree with the expectations, but they do have to follow them in order to ensure their survival.

³⁷ Harden 2012: 66

³⁸ Harden 2012: 66

Emotional Effects after Camp

Along with creating new emotional reactions to the political prison camps within North Korea, there is also the question of how political prison camps affect prisoners once they are released, or in the case of Shin in *Escape from Camp 14*, once they escape. One does not seem to think about what this looks like due to the unlikely idea of ever being released from a prison camp. However, this does occur. Also, at times, these former prisoners make it out of North Korea which results in a number of other emotional issues that they must deal with. The reader reads Shin's account of his experiences after life in a prison camp as being filled with turmoil and struggle. "He saw his mother hanged, Park's body on the fence, and visualized the torture he believed his father was subjected to after his escape."³⁹ As the nightmares continued, he dropped out of a course in automobile repair. He did not take driver's ed. He stopped eating. He struggled to sleep. He was all but paralyzed by guilt."⁴⁰ In the last section, I explained how Shin felt no remorse for the death of his mother or the fact that he was a significant reason why she was ultimately hanged. Now that Shin was no longer in a survival first mentality, guilt begins to be an emotion that he experiences for the first time. This guilt, coupled with the paranoia that most North Korean defectors experience, was a significant amount of emotions for Shin to come to grips with.

Limitations

While the literature on these political prison camps gives the reader a vision of the innumerable human rights violations, the verification of the actual violations are far more

³⁹ Park was the prisoner who Shin attempted to escape Camp 14 with. Park is electrocuted by the fence that lined the outside of the camp and died. Shin has to use his body as a shield from the fence in order to escape the camp. Harden 2012

⁴⁰ Harden 2012: 161-162

challenging. The United Nations access has been limited, and the extent of the documentation is limited due to the closed society associated with the “hermit kingdom” nature of North Korea.⁴¹ The secretiveness of North Korea makes it a challenge to any researcher wishing to analyze and study this regime. The sources of information are narrow where only dissidents discuss what they believe truly goes on within North Korea. It is even rarer to find someone to tell the inside stories of living in a political prison camp. Little has been published with regard to looking at this problem through the use of levels of analysis, and this thesis seeks to provide fresh insights and perspectives by employing such methods.

⁴¹ North Korea is seen as a “hermit kingdom,” according to Andrei Lankov, since the Choson dynasty from the 1300s-1900s. “At the time, Korea was intentionally isolated by its rulers, with unauthorized interaction between foreigners and Koreans largely banned. Today, North Korea continues this ancient tradition of self-isolation.”

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN: How are we going to understand these political prison camps?

Data: Population and Sample

The data that will be produced will use stories and interviews from the people of North Korea who have escaped from political prison camps. The documentation of this evidence will come from existing literature and historical documents. Case studies will seek to provide insight about the political prison camps in order to understand better the human rights abuses occurring there. United Nations documents, the Commission of Inquiry on the DPRK, and human rights organizations (such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch), will also be used to represent and inform about this situation. These organizations retrieve their information from North Korean refugees, former political prison camp survivors, former North Korean prison guards, as well as satellite images of North Korean prison camps, making the information retrieved as accurate as currently possible.

A number of biases and limitations will exist. First, the individual will be represented based on the United Nations Commission of Inquiry on North Korea and human rights organizations' articles which speak directly against the leadership of Kim Jong-un and the prison camps he permits. This presents bias due to the fact that the Kim regime will not be questioned and therefore equally represented. The Commission of Inquiry will be the main source of information in regards to the Kim regime and it states that,

Before publication, the Commission shared the findings of this report, in their entirety, with the Government of the DPRK and invited comments and factual corrections. A summary of the most serious concerns, in particular those indicating the commission of crimes against humanity, was also included in a

letter addressed to the Supreme Leader of the DPRK, Mr. Kim Jong-un. To the date of the writing of this report, there has been no response.⁴²

This shows that, while there is bias due to the fact that the Kim regime refuses to be interviewed or contribute to the Commission of Inquiry, the bias is self-inflicted by the regime. The United Nations, as well as other organizations, has attempted to portray the ideas and points of view of the regime to no avail. The regime chooses to remain completely isolated and thus leaves the international community to speculation.

Second, the research done in reference to the state level of analysis is largely dependent on the work of the United Nations and human rights organizations, as well as a few books written by people who were permitted to have extraordinary access to the state. As these human rights investigative organizations are rarely permitted inside North Korea, there is a potential for bias in not having access to information. These human rights organizations also act as watchdogs for human rights abuses internationally, making these organizations prone to be biased against certain states and events. Also, the books used to represent a part of the state are written by people who have escaped North Korea, and due to their traumatic situations could potentially forget or embellish events that have occurred. These people who have escaped may also have violated laws held by the North Korean government, and thus be dissidents from the state. There is also one example of a book written by a United States' citizen who was permitted to teach, and thus witness, the daily lives of the North Korean elite. Nonetheless, such materials will prove to bring a high level of legitimacy and public acceptance of their standards for inquiry.

Thirdly, the research conducted on behalf of the third image will be looking at different states in comparison to North Korea. These comparisons will be based on historical

⁴² Council 2014: 9

documentation of the political prison camps in other states. This will bring about bias due to the fact that we cannot completely confirm the similarities due to the isolated nature of North Korea. Also, seeing that we are looking at different countries and their participation in using political prison camps from different times throughout history, we cannot confirm nor deny the use of these camps from the perspective of that leadership. This will prove similar limitations to what we are seeing in researching current political prison camps in North Korea.

Along with the limitations of this study in regards to resource availability, this research will also be limited due to the interpretative and qualitative nature of the study. The research in this thesis will focus on case studies through the focalized attention being paid to the prison camps of North Korea. There will also be a plethora of case studies completed for the third image by examining countries such as Germany, Chile, Russia, and China.⁴³ While case study research can be a potentially narrow form of acquiring information on specific topics, the case studies used for this research will assist in completing the argument for the third image that political prison camps are a trend throughout the international community and not a specific and singular occurrence in North Korea. These case studies will support the idea that political prison camps have existed throughout history and throughout a plethora of regions in the world. Case studies are a legitimate and thorough method for understanding political prison camps internationally, as well as specifically in North Korea.

Measurement and Operationalization

The research of political prison camps in North Korea in this thesis will be broken down into three different categories. As stated earlier, the political prison camps will be analyzed

⁴³ Russia will be used throughout this paper to speak of the Gulags within that state. It is understood that during that time in history from 1917-1991 the state was known as the USSR.

according to the individual, the state, and the system according to Kenneth Waltz. Consequently, Kim Jong-un and the former leaders of the Kim regime will be analyzed under the first image primarily through the investigations of the Commission of Inquiry and peer-reviewed articles about the key leaders of North Korea. This thesis will also utilize Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision* to better explain the decision making process for the individual leaders of government. Kim Jong-un and the Kim regime's motivations for ruling the country, the treatment of citizens, and the involvement of these individuals within the state will be discussed. This image will prove to be the most difficult of the three due to the specificity of solely analyzing the Kim regime and its involvement in political prison camps in North Korea. Currently, there is no access to the Kim regime leadership, especially with Kim Jong-un himself. This lack of access limits the information we can pull into this thesis from the words of Kim Jong-un.

The second image, the state, will be explained largely on the research found in *Escape from Camp 14, Without You, There Is No Us*, as well as the Commission of Inquiry and other secondary resources. These resources will assist in portraying how the state and the government of the state view these political prison camps. Looking at these books, as well as United Nations documents, will assist in understanding the intensity of the state and its alliance and nationalism to the regime. These resources will help mitigate the issues that could be presented against this thesis in regards to how the state is portrayed due to the fact that one of the books is written from the perspective of the elite of North Korea. The use of this book will assist in portraying the mentality of those within the inner circle of the Kim regime. The use of this book will also give true examples of how the elite is trained and how they think from an relatively unbiased source.

Finally, the third image will be analyzed in a number of ways. The United Nations' Commission of Inquiry certainly provides a context for the human rights violations of North

Korea, and more importantly, offers the ability to see such camps as patterns that can be found at other places and during other time periods. The existence of political prison camps in Germany, Russia, Chile, and China will also be utilized to support the idea that these camps are actually a trend that can be found throughout the international system in other authoritarian states throughout history. These insights will be supported through *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* to represent the concentration camps of Germany, *The Gulag Archipelago* in reference to the Russian gulags, *Political Bodies: Gender, History, and the Struggle for Narrative Power in Recent Chilean Literature* to portray the camps in Chile, and *Bitter Winds: A Memoir of My Years in a China's Gulag* to portray the case of China, as well as other secondary sources to represent Germany, the USSR, Chile, and China. These examples will be especially effective due to the fact that these states and their political prison camps span the course of time and space. This thesis does not support the theory that these political prison camps are solely a contemporary issue or a regional issue. This thesis will support the assertion that political prison camps have existed for years and do not solely exist in Asian culture or North Korea as a state.

Along with portraying different states to show that political prison camps are a trend throughout the international community, this thesis will also explain the uncertainty that the anarchic system creates which can and has resulted in the formation of these political prison camps throughout time. This anarchic system in which the international community exists leaves people to experience uncertainty, and thus fear about their safety, power, and strength. This system results in a fight to protect one's country and one's people. This anarchic system also results in a sense of paranoia that may not be experienced were this anarchic system to no longer exist. Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State, and War* will be used further to support this theory.

Analytical Techniques

As mentioned previously, political prison camps within North Korea will be looked at through the images of Kenneth Waltz's three levels of analysis.⁴⁴ This will assist the reader in understanding the existence of political prison camps through the magnifying glass of the individual, the state, and the system to represent three different points of view into what has been classified as crimes against humanity.⁴⁵ This thesis will demonstrate the significance of using three lenses to understand better the existence of these camps.

The first image – the individual – seeks to show that political prison camps would not exist the way that they currently do in North Korea without the Kim regime. This image supports the assumption that the Kim regime plays a significant part in these human rights violations. According to this image, if another leadership had taken over during the formation of North Korea, if Russia had chosen another person to control the state, it is possible that these political prison camps would not have been utilized. The first image will also portray why these camps exist according to the psyches of the Kim regime. I will argue that political prison camps are necessary to ensure the success of the Kim regime from its perspective.

The second image – the state – will show that without the government, the citizens, and the media, these political prison camps would not exist or be accepted the way that these camps are today. The reader will see this through the monitoring system that the government officials and the citizens of North Korea have created that has resulted in the continued success of these political prison camps. The argument that will be presented is one that states that while the Kim regime may desire to successfully utilize these political prison camps, they would ultimately be unsuccessful without the support of the citizenry. What would happen if the people rose up

⁴⁴ Waltz 1954

⁴⁵ Council 2014

against the use of these camps? Would they still be as successful as they are today? This innate fear that exists within the people, along with a deep sense of nationalism, has resulted in the success of these camps. Nationalism appears to trump the fear that the international community assumes these citizens must feel. This thesis will show that the state may fear these camps but believe that they are necessary to sustain the state. I will argue that without these camps, citizens would be disrespectful and irreverent to the regime. These nationalistic people will not stand for allowing that to happen in their country like what they have been told occurs in numerous other states.

The third image – the system – will show that political prison camps are actually a trend that has already run its course or is still running its course in Germany during the Holocaust, Russia during the time of the Gulags, Chile during the time of Pinochet, and China until this past year of 2014. This last image will support the idea that political prison camps in North Korea is not an isolated incident of using political prison camps as the international community may believe them to be.⁴⁶ The international community is in an uproar in regards to the human rights abuses of North Korea as if they are an enigma used only by an insane dictatorship within North Korea. However, this image will support the idea that political prison camps can be used within any state at any point in time. Sometimes they occur by accident and are then utilized for decades to come. This realization may surprise readers when they learn that the history of these atrocious systems could actually have just spiraled past what the government or the policing system intended them to be. What if these camps are accidents that cannot be stopped? This thesis will then conclude with an analysis of which image would best explain the existence of political prison camps in North Korea based on research findings and personal interpretations.

⁴⁶ Waltz 1954

CHAPTER FOUR

THEORY AND ANALYSIS: Why does it all matter?

This thesis will analyze the use of the political prison camps of North Korea using the structure of Kenneth Waltz's classic treatment of levels of analysis made famous in his seminal work: *Man, the State, and War*.⁴⁷ Waltz uses levels of analysis as a social scientific microscope, seeking to bring clarity and perspective to the international events being examined. These levels are often referred to as the first, second, and third image by Waltz.

The First Image. The first level of analysis, according to Waltz, is the individual. To understand why events occur and why they occur the way that they do, one must first look at the key leaders involved in the events in question. "The most important causes of political arrangements and acts are found in the nature and behavior of man."⁴⁸ For Waltz, the individual is not controlled by reason but by passion.⁴⁹ Man is flawed due to his inherent desires, passion for power, and innate fears. In employing this approach, the Kim regime of North Korea is no different. The thirst and inherent need for power and prestige has been made apparent throughout the former and current reign of the Kim regime.

This thirst and need for power within North Korea was initiated by Russia shortly after the end of World War II. With the end of colonialism by Japan after their loss in World War II, Russia took control of the northern part of the Korean Peninsula. Russia placed Kim Il-sung as the leader of the new state due to his training in the Red Army, and Kim Il-sung quickly became known as the "Great Leader" and the "Eternal President."⁵⁰ The beginning of the Kim regime saw an immediate and thorough control of the state and its people as could be seen

⁴⁷ Waltz 1954: 42

⁴⁸ Waltz 1954

⁴⁹ Waltz 1954

⁵⁰ Kristof 1998: 1

simultaneously occurring in Russia.⁵¹ Due to this obedience to Russia, Kim Il-sung enjoyed numerous years of support from his communist comrades to the north. With this new leadership came the formation of the state known today as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, an isolated and thoroughly monitored state compared to the rest of the international community.

Although Russia played an integral role in creating the DPRK, there are historical and religious motives behind the make-up of this state as well. The Commission of Inquiry on the DPRK specifically explains these reasons. Korean culture is based in Confucian ideas and standards which is what the Kim regime uses in order to support their right to be the sole leaders of North Korea. Kim Il-sung established his right to rule under the "Mandate of Heaven". This "Mandate of Heaven" asserts that a Korean ruler has achieved that status due to the wishes of the gods. This status was not given lightly, though. The ruler was expected to rule "justly and fairly and for the benefit of all the people." The system of *Suryong* "positioned Kim Il-sung (and his heir apparent) as unchallenged rulers due to their proclaimed wisdom and benevolence under which the general population would live in a prosperous and righteous society."⁵² Due to the religious zeal of the North Korean population and the convincing nature of the Kim regime, the leadership remains unchallenged to this day.

Throughout the history of the Kim regime, this narcissism is at the center. Kim Il-sung's narcissism included a cult of personality focused solely on his leadership. As one former dissident stated in the UN Commission of Inquiry with regard to North Korea, "the only ideology, the only religion that is allowed is the ideology of Kim Il-sung."⁵³ Kim Il-sung believed that he should be seen as the god of the North Korean people, providing and protecting

⁵¹ BBC News 2014

⁵² Council 2014: 27

⁵³ Council 2014: 68

his citizens against outside forces. Any dissidents to the Kim Il-sung ideology would receive quick and harsh punishment from the time of Kim Il-sung's reign to today. It has been argued that the reason for this narcissism exhibited by Kim Il-sung was due to a need to unite the North Korean people.

Along with the narcissism of Kim Il-sung, there also existed a real paranoia of uprising and destruction of the state among the Kim regime. In Graham Allison's *Essence of Decision*, Allison writes that "strategic behavior influences an actor's choice by working on his expectations of how his behavior is related to his adversary's."⁵⁴ Such insight assists in understanding the decision making process of the Kim regime in a number of ways. First, North Korea is paranoid by the international community which can explain why the state remains isolationist in nature. North Korea specifically has the greatest aggression towards the United States due to the fact that the Kim regime sees the United States as the reason behind the division of the Koreas.⁵⁵ In order to fight this threat, the people of North Korea must be united against this cause according to Kim's logic. North Korea's behavior is related to the United States' behavior in that the Kim regime must be prepared for any attempt made by the United States to sway the thoughts and opinions of North Koreans. This fear could be one reason why the closed borders exist, but also why political prison camps exist. Any dissent of the regime could be an infiltration made by the United States to overthrow the Kim regime. These thoughts could be one reason behind the paranoia we see in the Kim regime. Secondly, the Kim regime has to fight the adversaries that are inevitably going to exist within the state due to the free will of man. While the Kim regime tries its best to use propaganda and nationalism as an attempt to thwart these

⁵⁴ Allison 1971: 15

⁵⁵ Council 2014

dissenting points of view, political prison camps are necessary in order to keep adversaries away from law abiding citizens.

The Kim regime also uses other tactics in order to maintain their control over the state. The Commission of Inquiry quotes Kim Il-sung saying, “Religion is a kind of myth. Whether you believe Jesus or Buddha, it essentially believes a myth. We cannot take religious people to the socialist state. Religious people should die to cure their habit.”⁵⁶ Kim Il-sung and the Kim regime believe that religious freedom, outside of the religious commitment and allegiance to the Kim regime, if not monitored by the state can result in the destruction of the state. Kim Il-sung believed that this could be seen by looking at Eastern Europe and its destruction at the end of the Cold War. Kim Il-sung listed his reasons for forbidding religions that were not state supported as the following:

1. They do not genuinely worship the leaders, adhere to another ideology, and therefore pose a threat to the stability of the society;
2. They are considered to be spies of ‘Christian states like South Korea and the United States’;
3. They are held responsible for the end of the communist bloc in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.⁵⁷

Hans Morgenthau seemed to have a premonition about the situation in North Korea when he said that he sees “‘the ubiquity of evil in human action’ arising from man’s ineradicable lust for power and transforming ‘churches into political organizations...revolutions into dictatorships...love for country into imperialism.’”⁵⁸ The Kim regime in North Korea has taken

⁵⁶ Council 2014: 71

⁵⁷ Council 2014: 72

⁵⁸ Waltz 1954: 24

religion, revolution, and love for country and reduced it to a set of stringent rules which, if not followed, will result in starvation, torture, and execution in a political prison camp.

The Second Image. The second image focuses attention on the state and society of North Korea itself. When scholars and policymakers claim that the state is making a decision, such a statement implies that the government, the institutions, and the public within the state – those things that are unique to the particular state or society being examined – are all contributing to the outcome. The second image posits that those factors internal to the state hold the greatest promise for finding answers to the event seeking to be explained, such as the political prison camps being examined through this thesis. A quote by Jean Bodin, a political theorist from the 16th century, states in *Man, the State, and War* that strength and state unity can be achieved if the state were “to find an enemy against whom they can make a common cause.”⁵⁹ Both the North Korean government and the public have done so by choosing the United States and democracy as an enemy, as evidenced by the Commission of Inquiry’s statement that, “Propaganda is further used by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to incite nationalistic hatred towards official enemies of the state: Japan, the United States of America, and the Republic of Korea, and their nationals.”⁶⁰ The Commission goes on to explain reasons why specifically the United States is seen as a national enemy. This dates back to before the Korean War in 1945. In 1945, the United States decided that Korea would be split into two separate countries at the 38th parallel. The United States sent 25,000 troops to Korea in order to fulfill this goal. The Commission states, “They (soldiers) were often met with resentment and resistance.”⁶¹ The hatred portrayed in today’s North Korea originated here and has created this unity and

⁵⁹ Waltz 1954: 58

⁶⁰ Council 2014: 73

⁶¹ Council 2014: 22

nationalistic allegiance to the state that may not have been experienced before. Political prison camps are seen as a part of this state, and are permitted to exist because of this allegiance to the state.

In *Without You, There is No Us*, one can see how these political prison camps are permitted to continue in the face of fear that the North Korean citizens experience. The levels of propaganda spread throughout the country on a daily basis are extensive. For example, Suki Kim writes in *Without You, There is No Us*, that every home in North Korea has a speaker that's sole purpose is to air propaganda into every home.⁶² These people are indoctrinated to revere their Great Leaders due to daily infiltration by the government and society. Kim goes on to state that, there is an obsession within North Korea that they are exceptionally more advanced than other countries.⁶³ In the face of these human rights abuses, with the propaganda pouring into the lives of the citizens, permitted by them and all government officials ensured that they would not question the state of the country. The North Korean citizens believed that they were experiencing one of the greatest lives in the greatest country. To question the regime would be to lose their coveted position.

For this reason, anyone who is seen to be going against the state and the regime will be placed in a political prison camp to avoid further threat. Due to the isolationist nature of the North Korean state, the citizens of North Korea fully support the government. The citizens follow rigid schedules with specific jobs and responsibilities to complete. Along with these responsibilities, the citizens are often required to participate in self-criticisms at their workplace. The workers and leadership will discuss everything that is wrong with the system of the workplace and the workers and how each worker could do better. Mrs. Song, an average and law

⁶² Kim 2014

⁶³ Kim 2014

abiding citizen in North Korea turned dissident, in *Nothing to Envy: Ordinary Lives in North Korea*, speaks about sleep deprivation, lectures, and self-criticism being used constantly which has resulted in wiping out any potential uprisings that could occur.⁶⁴ Mrs. Song highlights the difference between the first and second image according to Waltz. In the second image, the chastisement that is experienced by every kind of leadership has led to a forced blind faith in the leadership out of fear.

Also, due to this fear, it is an envied position to be in some form of leadership within North Korea. This leadership is then taught how to control and punish the people below them. This hierarchy can be seen in the Commission of Inquiry. The Commission of Inquiry explains food deprivation within the political prison camps of North Korea is a significant part of the experience. Starvation is frequently used “as a means of control and punishment in detention facilities. Cuts to rations were part of guards training and described in prison documents.”⁶⁵ Not only do the prison guards participate in the starvation of the prisoners they control, they do not do this blindly as could potentially be assumed due to the fact that it is just part of their training. “Prison camps authorities were fully aware of the results of this deprivation as regular medical checks were performed on inmates.”⁶⁶ The prison camp guards are aware that they are slowly killing inmates by starving them of basic food needs. However grotesque this appears to the outside world, this is part of life in political prison camps.

⁶⁴ Demick 2010

⁶⁵ Council 2014: 207

⁶⁶ Council 2014: 207

The Third Image. The final – and most compelling image for Waltz – is the system.⁶⁷

The system level suggests that the events under analysis are less a function of the key leaders and events unique to the state or society being analyzed but are in fact part of a larger pattern or trend that can be observed in other places and at other times. These trends occur due to the anarchical system discussed in Waltz's *Man, the State, and War*. The international system exists in an anarchical system absent of rules, regulations, and a monitoring system. Due to this lack of control, the international community is in a constant fight to maintain power. This need to maintain power stems from the fear of being overtaken by competing states. In *Man, the State, and War*, Waltz tells us that due to the anarchical nature of the international system, the good cannot be praised and the bad cannot be punished by an overarching body. Instead states have to consider what the other has to offer to the state.⁶⁸ This idea supports the assumption that it is a trend throughout states to control and monitor its own people in order to ensure its safety should it be attacked by outside forces. If the state is not strong within itself then it will fall when it faces trials. This need for strength is why unity and nationalism are such significant factors within a state. Without them, the state has the potential to fail.

Benedict Spinoza, argued to be the first political philosopher of true importance states that this violence in the international community is also a product of human imperfections.

“Passion displaces reason, and consequently men, who out of self-interest ought to cooperate with one another in perfect harmony, engage endlessly in quarrels and physical violence. The

⁶⁷ The assumptions of structural realism are an inherent component of Waltz's third image. According to Robert Keohane in *Neorealism*, realism “contained three key assumptions: (1) states (or city-states) are the key units of action; (2) they seek power, either as an end in itself or as a means to other ends; and (3) they behave in ways that are, by and large, rational, and therefore comprehensible to outsiders in rational terms.” Realism is based on an anarchic system consisting of selfish players whose main concern is survival.

⁶⁸ Waltz 1954

defectiveness of man is the cause of conflict. Logically, if this is the sole cause, the end of conflict must depend on the reform of men.”⁶⁹ Violence, including the use of political prison camps, can be arguably the fault of the imperfection of man. The international community has seen political prison camps throughout countries that span the globe. Where is the connection? Why is this method used in different countries throughout the world and throughout the expanse of time?

In this respect, the existence of political prison camps in North Korea may best be understood by gleaning insight from other examples of political prison camps used by authoritarian regimes at different times and in different locations. Examples will be taken from areas such as Germany, Russia, Chile, and China.

⁶⁹ Waltz 1954: 162

CHAPTER FIVE

CASE STUDIES: Just How Unique is North Korea?

Russia

Indeed, the prison camps of North Korea often are referred to as gulags after the prison camps that existed in Russia during the Cold War. There are many similarities between the two examples as well as some differences. In Russia, from 1929 to 1953, it is estimated that roughly 476 camps existed. Within those camps were smaller divisions of camps called lagpunkts which could be permanent, temporary, or a part of separate camps.⁷⁰ In *Gulag*, one is told the story of Lev Finkelstein's experiences in the Russian Gulags. While being structured and sub-structured in camp units, there is also a specific and dangerous expectation of incoming prisoners when they are entering the camps.

“There is a huge column of prisoners, you are counted, re-counted, re-counted. The train is there...then there is the travel order: ‘On your knees!’ During loading, it was a sensitive time, someone could start running. So they make sure that everybody is standing on their knees. But you better not get up, because at that point they are trigger-happy. Then they count, they put people onto the car, and lock them up.”⁷¹

The process for getting to the actual prison camps were also upsetting and terrifying for the new prisoners. It was a long and substantial process for the prisoners, unlike what is read about the prison camps of North Korea. Another significant difference between the Russian gulags and the North Korean prison camps is that those brought to the Russian gulags had actually been tried and sentenced. This fact was helpful to these prison guards working in the gulags because when they watched a person be treated as less than human they could often revert back to the thought that it was justice in action. “Undoubtedly, the conviction that they were acting within the law

⁷⁰ Applebaum 2003

⁷¹ Applebaum 2003: 162

was part of what motivated those working within the security services, as well as the guards and administrators who later controlled the prisoners' lives in the camps."⁷² This process was significantly different than what has been experienced in North Korea. The prison guards of North Korea are seen to be aggressive to the prisoners based on fear and allegiance to the regime, not based on knowledge that the prisoners within the camps have been tried and sentenced to a life in the camps.

However different the actual sentencing process is between the Russian gulags and the North Korean political prison camps, one thing was the same. The reasoning behind finding the person guilty was identical. North Korea has established a system of informants within the state to alert the police to people and families who seem to be acting as dissidents in secret. The Russians worked similarly with the Secret Police. Those within Russia would be brought to the gulags if "a neighbor had heard them tell an unfortunate joke, a boss had seen them engaging in 'suspicious' behavior – and in larger part because they belonged to whichever population category was at that moment under suspicion."⁷³ Depending on the year, these could include engineers, specialists, kulaks, Poles, Balts, or foreigners.⁷⁴ Like in North Korea, there did not need to be any significant supporting evidence that proved the person or family in question to be guilty. The mere threat would be enough to send them to the gulags.

In *The Gulag Archipelago*, a prisoner in one of these gulags states that numerous people had been beaten within the *kartorgas* and it was not even called torture.⁷⁵ Abuse and torture was commonplace in the Russian gulags, much like the political prison camps of North Korea. These similarities seen throughout the stories and history of the Russian gulags compared to the North

⁷² Applebaum 2003: 122

⁷³ Applebaum 2003: 122

⁷⁴ Applebaum 2003

⁷⁵ Solzhenitsyn 1978

Korean political prison camps is simple. In *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea's Prison Camps*, it states, "It is clear...that the North Korean camps were built according to a Stalinist model, and that they continue to be run that way."⁷⁶ Not only are they run the same way, the blind faith in these camps by the citizens of Russia were identical to what we are seeing today in North Korea.

Chekhov complained that we had no 'legal definition of *katorga*, or of its purpose.⁷⁷ But that was in the enlightened nineteenth century! In the middle of the twentieth, the cave man's century, we didn't even feel the need to understand and define. Old Man Stalin had decided that it would be so – and that was the definition necessary. We just nodded our heads in understanding.⁷⁸

As was seen previously, the government of North Korea was initiated by Stalin in an attempt to expand Communism. It is no surprise then that the North Koreans modeled their penal system off of the examples that were witnessed within Russia. It is also no surprise that the citizenry also behaves in identical ways. These similarities do not mean, though, that Stalin was the ultimate reason behind the prison camps of Russia and North Korea as seen within the third image. Instead, it is a trend that has swept and is continuing to sweep through numerous states. Russia is one example that North Korea used to model its own system after.

China

Another example of political prison camps close to North Korea is those within China. China is currently one of the only significant allies of North Korea and for understandable reasons when one takes a look at China's current system of government. China is a Communist society with an autocratic ruler. China became a Communist state in 1949 when the dynastic rule

⁷⁶ Hawk 2003: 9

⁷⁷ *Katorga* was the Russian name for its labor camp system.

⁷⁸ Solzhenitsyn 1978: 36

of China was overthrown. The political prison camps in China almost mirror those of North Korea. According to Stephen Mosher in *Chinese Prison Labor*, there are roughly 10 million prisoners in 300 camps across China. Like North Korea, family members often disappear and are placed within these camps for “re-education”. This “re-education” process is to establish a greater autocratic rule within China. Political prison camps are often used as a fear tactic to keep their free citizens within the control of the government. Not only does this keep the power of the Chinese government, it also is a form of free labor that is used to boost the economy of China. According to Mosher, 2 billion yuan was made by China in 1988 by prison labor which translates into \$319,254,240 (USD). The system of prison camps is formalized and hierarchical within China. Prisoners within the Chinese labor camps fall under three different types of prisoners. The first group consists of those that have been arrested, tried, and found guilty of a crime. The second group has been sentenced by public security forces and has not been tried fairly. The last group has been placed there by the Forced Job Placement program after they have finished their sentence.⁷⁹ Both the Chinese government and the Kim regime are using political prison camps to maintain their influence and power within their states. The fear instilled within the citizens of China and North Korea keep them reverent and submissive to their governments.

In *Bitter Winds*, the reader sees firsthand what it looks like to be a political prisoner within the camps of China through Harry Wu’s eyes. The prisoners are forced to listen to political instructors in order to convert them. These political instructors will read from Chinese Communist newspapers in order to fixate the minds of these prisoners back on what China sees as the correct structure of government. These prisoners are in constant fear that at any moment

⁷⁹ Mosher 1991

they will be taken from their reintegration programs to be interrogated. Interrogation is a fearful event because one does not know what to expect or to say in order to guarantee their safety.

In *Bitter Winds*, one sees the prisoner planning for what he will say in interrogation. He says, “I knew that as a new prisoner I might at any moment be summoned for interrogation. I needed to determine the probable reason for my arrest so that I could devise an explanation.”⁸⁰ This is similar to what has been seen in the political prison camps of North Korea. Many citizens are taken at unexpected times and for unexplained reasons to these camps. The citizens do not know what crime that have committed, only that now they and their families are within the confines of a prison camp. The reader then witnesses Harry confess to being a “counterrevolutionary rightist” and attacking the Communist Party in the Hundred Flowers campaign.⁸¹ Even though he was not guilty of what he confessed to, the prison guards stated that they were already aware of what he was confessing to and that they needed more. They stated, “Don’t you understand the Party’s policy? Leniency to those who confess, harshness to those who resist reform.”⁸² In both systems, it is seen that the ultimate goal of the political system is to end resistance towards the regime. This paranoia is significant, and while it ties back to the first image, it is significant to the third image in that paranoia is a characteristic of man in its entirety. This paranoia is not a singular event in a few countries that possess fear that their regimes could potentially fall. It is a fault in mankind that can be witnessed throughout the system as a trend. It is not a singular event.

⁸⁰ Wakeman 1994: 48

⁸¹ Wakeman 1994: 49

⁸² Wakeman 1994: 49

Germany

While Russian gulags may be familiar to the public's historical knowledge, the Nazi concentration camps seem to have seared deeper into the memory of many people's historical memory. When people imagine Nazi concentration camps, they imagine 6 million Jews dying and many more starving to the point where they look as if they only consist of skin and bones. But why did the German government and Adolf Hitler fear the Jews, as well as other outlier groups within Germany? Were these camps used to fight dissidents like what we have seen in North Korea today, or was the purpose behind them vastly different?

Nazi concentration camps actually were not intended to be used for a significant amount of time by the German government. These camps were actually a rogue creation by a group of Nazis. The government of Adolf Hitler did not initially endorse these camps. Like what is seen in many countries, Germany had a prisoner population issue in that they could not find enough room to fit all of its prisoners in the normal jails that were intended for the prisoners. For this reason, they were creative in creating these concentration camps in old military barracks and castles. They were also used as an area to torture Communists.⁸³

There was a significant difference between these political prison camps and those of North Korea. The people of Germany were informed of the exact purpose of the political prison camps within the state, while those in North Korea do not completely understand the reason for the political prison camps of its state. An example of just how clear Germany was when discussing the creation and purpose of its political prison camps can be seen in Munich. In 1933, Heinrich Himmler announced to the state that he was the new Police President of Munich. This

⁸³ Gellately 2001

Police President would be in charge of the political prison camps of Munich.⁸⁴ The news of the political prison camps opening throughout the state were announced through reports in almost every location in Germany.⁸⁵

It was a celebration because the government announced it as a fight against Communism and Marxism. Releasing the prisoners from the crowded jails was not an option. It was believed that if they were released that they would continue their rebellious acts.⁸⁶ Once again, we see that a government is afraid of a specific style of government or a group of revolutionaries overtaking the current system of government. Fear is apparent in this system. Due to the fact that the government was afraid of what could happen if they did not maintain control of the people, they attempted to instill fear in the people. It was an effective tactic. A common saying during the 1930s in Germany about the Dachau concentration camp was, “Dear God, make me mum so that I don’t to Dachau come.”⁸⁷ Children knew of these camps and feared them. Being suspected of Communism could result in staying in a concentration camp for an endless amount of time. Many people placed in these camps did not receive a fair trial or a trial at all depending on the situation. Much like in North Korea, people who were sentenced to these camps did not have an opportunity to defend themselves. They were simply suspected of crimes against the state, and due to the fear discussed previously, placed in these camps in order to protect the state.

Now we must discuss how these political prison camps advanced to include not only Communists, but Jews, gypsies, homosexuals, and the many other groups believed by the German government to deserve the treatment of political prison camps. Blame is the reason.

⁸⁴ Gellately 2001

⁸⁵ Gellately 2001

⁸⁶ Gellately 2001

⁸⁷ Gellately 2001: 8

Germany had to blame someone for the events that occurred during World War I. Germany had been extremely embarrassed after the events that transpired during that war, and to accept blame for the events that occurred would be to show the weakness of the German government. That was not an option. For that reason, the German government had to blame someone, so they decided to blame the Jewish population which then expanded to include numerous other groups. Along with this need to blame someone, the German government was also benefitting from the free labor. The more people they blamed the less blame the German government had to accept and, in their eyes, the more people they had to work without pay which could result in a better economy for Germany. There was no losing side to this plan for the German government. This looks identical to what we are seeing in North Korea today. The only difference is that the North Korean government accepts Communism and rejects democracy. The Korean people also must blame someone for their people starving, so they blame the United States and South Korea for taking their resources. Anyone who seems to be siding with democracy and capitalism will be thrown into a political prison camp for re-education. Along with needing someone to blame, the free labor is also helpful in order to protect that meager economic system they currently have. Fear, blame, and money are all integral parts to understanding why political prison camps have trended through numerous states through time and regions.

Chile

Much like what was seen in Germany, the example of Chile is used in order to portray a different culture and time period that has used similar camp ideas in order to control its people. This will further support the idea that political prison camps are in fact a trend that spans distance and time. The disappearance of Chilean citizens and the use of political prison camps was frequent in Chile in the 1970s. Much like in North Korea and the other states that have been

analyzed, the capture of citizens and the placement of them in political prison camps was done secretly and without the foreknowledge of those being convicted. Chile, however, feared a specific group of people within their citizenry, not the whole citizenry like what is being seen in North Korea. “The disappeared in Chile were in the vast majority (about 95 percent) male and most frequently (though by no means exclusively) from working-peasant class backgrounds.”⁸⁸ This showed the inexperience of the Chilean leadership in preventing the uprising of which they feared. The unimportant group of people, specifically women, was able to act freely without the fear of being under suspect or the potential to be imprisoned. This differs from what is seen today in North Korea. The government of North Korea has punished everyone ranging from the lowest class up to the family of the Kim regime.

In *Political Bodies*, the book references a Spanish book entitled *Widows* by Ariel Dorfman which makes the argument that Waltz would make about the third image in regards to political prison camps throughout the international community. *Widows* states that political prison camps and the tragedies that are tied with them could happen “en todas partes y en cualquier momentos y a cualquier persona” which translates to mean “anywhere, at any moment, and to any person. “Dorfman’s answer is that certain fundamental social structures have been culturally constructed, and reconstructed, via the same deep exclusions and violence over time, such that similar crises have been triggered at various points throughout modern history.”⁸⁹ The only difference between these political prison camps seems to be the motive behind them. The Chilean example is based more on gender than governmental structure like what is visible in the current crisis in North Korea. “The military men fear the dissolution of both the masculinist self and the Chilean Fatherland – a disintegration or chaos culturally linked with unbound femininity

⁸⁸ Nelson 2002: 50

⁸⁹ Nelson 2002: 60

and with the uncontained working/peasant class activism of the Allende years.”⁹⁰ Chile feared that women, as well as the working class, would ultimately overtake the Chilean government. For that reason, the government believed that repression of these two groups of people was the only way to protect the integrity of the government. Once again, we see that fear is at the root of this turmoil and violence. The problem for all of the examples seen in this thesis is that the government fears its own people and cannot trust its own people to not rebel against it. For that reason, the government believes that inciting fear into the people is the only preventive action to take.

Consequently, the system level of analysis permits us to envision these political prison camps as mirroring what occurred elsewhere and in relation to the uncertainty and freedom that is permitted due to the international anarchic system. We have witnessed that these camps have occurred in numerous states throughout different time periods and different regions. These events call into question the assumption that political prison camps are a product of a specific leader or a specific state’s people and government. While the government type has remained similar throughout most of the examples provided, there are still instances throughout history that support the assumption that government type is also not a significant contributor to the existence of prison camps. These prison camps exist in states that possess fear and a desire to protect its security. This fear and need for security can be seen throughout the international system based on the anarchic system. No state is safe from its enemies because there is no true justice system to rely on. One must maintain unity and strength in order to feel that it has the capabilities to protect itself against impending destruction. This trend has the potential to be stemmed if the international system would change its anarchical nature. The international

⁹⁰ Nelson 2002: 61

paranoia would be reduced, and thus the incessant need of countries to protect themselves from citizens who believe differently than the government. There could be a greater sense of international freedom because protection would be guaranteed. These potential changes are why this thesis supports the idea that the third level of analysis, or third image, agrees with Kenneth Waltz when he stated that he believed the third image to be the most compelling of the images. This belief may not be the case for every international event that occurs, however, with the example of political prison camps; the third image provides the best explanation for their existence throughout time and space.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: So why are political prison camps in North Korea important again?

Political prison camps in any state and at any time are difficult to comprehend for those who do not live within their grasp. For that reason, this thesis has utilized Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis to examine the political prison camps of North Korea. North Korea was chosen due to the fact that it is a current issue, and it is an issue that is just now receiving international attention. North Korea has taken advantage of its isolationist nature in order to commit these human rights abuses and the international community has been forced to remain outside of these borders due to international sovereignty that is honored by most states. Political prison camps, such as those within North Korea and in Germany, Chile, Russia, and China in the past, have been labeled human rights violations due to their poor treatment of its inmates. This thesis attempted to show the difference between political prison camps and the prison system that is accepted internationally.

While all of these goals were hopefully conveyed, the main goal of this thesis was to analyze political prison camps through the levels of analysis in order to assist in explaining the existence of political prison camps through three lenses. We first saw what political prison camps look like through the first lens: the individual. We looked at political prison camps through the Kim regime's eyes. Why do these political prison camps need to exist in order to satisfy their goals? We found that they are significant in protecting their goals in maintaining power on the state in the face of a world that would show them that their lives are vastly different and worse than those in surrounding states. We also saw that political prison camps exist based on the narcissism of the Kim regime. They desire power, which is a significant component to the

overarching theory of realism. Due to this narcissism and paranoia that accompanies the narcissism, the Kim regime holds that political prison camps must exist in order to accomplish their goals.

The second lens that we looked at was the state. We saw how the government and citizenry are integral to maintaining these political prison camps. The government encourages the people to monitor and betray their neighbors in order to appear trustworthy to the regime. Due to this sense of nationalism and unity, it is easy for the government officials to find volunteers. If these citizens and government officials were not deeply entrenched in the goals of the regime, these prison camps could potentially be ineffective or lead to a coup against the regime. These people are tied so deeply to the regime because they agree to be isolated from the outside world which leaves them unaware of what they are agreeing to and the life they are potentially losing to protect what they do not fully understand.

Finally, we looked at the third lens: the system. Kenneth Waltz argues that this is the most significant lens within the levels of analysis.⁹¹ In order to explain political prison camps, one path to understanding them is to view them from a different perspective. The first and second lens allowed us to see political prison camps an enigma that is unique to North Korea. The third lens takes a completely different path to understanding these camps. What if this is not a gross violation made by one crazed state with an insane dictator? What if this is a trend that has made its way throughout the international community spanning distance and time? The best supporting evidence in regards to this argument was presented in the book *Widows* within the book *Political Bodies*, which stated that political prison camps could happen “anywhere, at any,

⁹¹ Waltz 1954

moment, and to any person.⁹² *Political Bodies* goes on to explain that “certain fundamental social structures have been culturally constructed, and reconstructed, via the same deep exclusions and violence over time, such that similar crises have been triggered at various points throughout modern history.”⁹³ Essentially, the argument made here is that it does not depend on the individual and the state as to why these political prison camps exist. It is violence and exclusion that has been internationally accepted through history. The argument is that the political prison camps are a trend, not an isolated incident.

The third lens also argues that political prison camps can exist due to the type of system that is seen throughout the international community. Currently we live in a system of anarchy. Anarchy is a system without an overarching government or policing system. This system is why paranoia exists among world leaders and why states, such as North Korea, are able to commit these human rights abuses without any repercussions. This system is also what makes it difficult to end the trend of prison camps that we have seen throughout history. Some could be argued that the anarchy, and thus the national sovereignty, that we accept and herald as our free will, is ultimately the factor that has resulted in endless wars and conflicts throughout the international community. Until this system is changed, the same will continue to occur throughout much of the future.

While looking at these lenses has assisted in explaining the existence of political prison camps in North Korea, another argument can be made about which lens is the most helpful or the most significant in understanding these political prison camps. When this project first started, I would have stood by the assumption that the first lens would be the most helpful in

⁹² Nelson 2002: 60

⁹³ Nelson 2002: 60

understanding political prison camps. How could we not believe that the Kim regime played a significant role in the existence of these camps? If Korea had remained whole, and Park Geun-hye was the leader of the entire peninsula, would these camps still exist under her rule? I would not think so. But to place the blame on one person or one family has proved to place too much power in too few of hands. While my internal argument started off supporting the first lens, some may argue that the second lens is the best place to look for any answer. It is true that this expands the responsibility, which I have found to be necessary when explaining how these camps exist. The government and citizens would not have these camps if they did not permit them. That is true to an extent. However, to completely understand this we would have to delve deep into the idea of group think, and who created this idea of group think? Would group think be a relevant argument if we really were an international community as we constantly hear international news correspondents refer to us? For this reason, the third lens has proven to be the most significant lens in explaining political prison camps.⁹⁴ Through the research we have seen that the system, as well as the trends that permeate the system, can best explain the political prison camps of North Korea. They exist because of the trend that has made its way through history and regions. Political prison camps are not a manifestation of the North Korean regime or citizenry. These camps are a historical event that has occurred throughout time and space based on the needs of the current leadership. These camps are based on our acceptance of violence and our vehement belief that national sovereignty cannot be violated. What if the North Korean government understood that a police force could come into the country and detain all those who had

⁹⁴ I understand that some may believe that this thesis was written with a bias towards the third image due to the length of supporting evidence provided for this image compared to the first and second. I would like to argue that, while that is true, one must also understand the lack of access that is available to support the first and second image. Due to the plethora of knowledge of other states with political prison camps that is readily available, the argument could more accurately be made to support the third image.

participated in these human rights violations? Would they continue to occur? Most likely, they would not. However, because of our system of anarchy they are permitted to occur. To ensure that this no longer continues, we must look at our current system and what needs to change in order to ensure that these events did not continue into our posterity.

While this thesis has taken a detailed look into the secretive political prison camps of North Korea, there is still much more to be done in order to fully expose these political prison camps. Future research should look into the potential hierarchy that exists within the political prison camps. Does this hierarchy play a role in keeping the prisoners at bay? Does the favorable treatment by the prison guards to these prisoners who are high on the hierarchy scale assist with this control? Also, there is the question of why they are permitted to continue. We have previously discussed the issue of our anarchic system, but is there another way around this issue. “High school students in America debate why President Roosevelt didn’t bomb the rail lines to Hitler’s camps. Their children may ask, a generation from now, why the West stared at far clearer satellite images of Kim Jong Il’s camps, and did nothing.”⁹⁵ Further research and attention given to this topic may assist in changing the future of North Korea and the history we leave to our posterity. We must be the change we wish to see in the world in order to protect our future.

⁹⁵ Harden 2012: 8

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