

NORTH KOREA IN THE EUROPEAN PRESS: AN ANALYSIS OF STEREOTYPES IN BRITISH, FRENCH, AND GERMAN NEWSPAPERS¹

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Although North Korea is a recurring topic in international politics, research analyzing its depiction in the media remains scant, with much of it focused on South Korea and the United States. The perspective of European states, however, has been largely ignored. This paper aims to fill this gap by analyzing the coverage of North Korea in 2014 by several major European newspapers from the United Kingdom, Germany, and France. Via a focus on the stereotypes visible in their reporting, the prevalent depictions of North Korea as well as national differences are uncovered. The main findings of the study are that, first, the dominant narrative about North Korea is the same across all analyzed newspapers. It depicts the country as an authoritarian dictatorship that is isolated from the international community and maintains a belligerent stance in dealing with the world. Second, humanitarian and human rights issues receive far less attention in the reporting. Third, the depiction of North Korea as a threat and an object of ridicule varies across the analyzed newspapers. Finally, in contrast to what other studies argue especially about the coverage of American newspapers, North Korea is usually not depicted as falling apart or irrational.

North Korea is commonly referred to as the Hermit Kingdom, a term that from the outset implies how difficult it is to gain a realistic understanding of the country. Few have direct access to the country, and those who enter as tourists or journalists usually face severe restrictions as to where they

¹ An earlier version of this article was presented at The World Congress for Korean Politics and Society in Gyeongju, South Korea, on August 25, 2015.

can go, what they can see, and to whom they can talk. Regardless – or maybe because – of these constraints, North Korea attracts the attention and interest of the outside world. The release of a variety of books and films about the country over the course of the past years is testament to this. Yet, the common representation of the country in the media has been criticized and called into question from various sides. Recent books consequently explicitly target prevalent clichés that are “largely wrong,”² call out “the punditry, misconceptions, and caricatures in the news and entertainment media,”³ and speak of the “uninformative, unreliable, often sensationalized”⁴ reporting in the press.

Much of these criticisms target – explicitly or not – the reporting in the American media in particular, or in the English-language media, in general. Academic studies on North Korea’s representation in popular media also refer primarily to American publications or outlets in the countries surrounding North Korea, namely South Korea, China, and Japan. In contrast to this, little to no attention has been given to how the European media depict North Korea. This is understandable: Europe is geographically distant, not directly affected by the disputes surrounding North Korea, and not part of institutions such as the Six-Party Talks. Therefore, it stands to reason that North Korea would feature less prominently in European newspapers, as well as in the region’s public and political discourses.

At the same time, an analysis of the European media has merits of its own. For one, it provides a useful control group with which the knowledge on the media’s reporting on North Korea in other countries can be compared. It is easy to see why North Korea might be portrayed as a potential threat in South Korea and the United States – and why the relationships of these countries might coincide with caricatures, sensationalism, and ideology-driven depictions of North Korea, as many observers describe it. Is this also the case in the media of European countries, which might be less predisposed towards North Korea due to the geographic distance and the lower political stakes? Secondly, European nations are shifting more attention towards Asia.⁵ The European Union has repeatedly expressed its

2 Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xi.

3 Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (London: Bodley Head, 2012), 16.

4 Bruce Cumings, *North Korea: Another Country* (New York: The New Press, 2004), xii.

5 See for example Sophie Dembinski, “Pivot to Asia Together,” *US News World Report*, September 25, 2014, accessed November 12, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2014/09/25/incoming-eu-foreign-policy-chief-sees-benefits-of-pivoting-to-asia>.

ambition to push North Korea towards denuclearization,⁶ and analysts have called for a stronger European presence in this context.⁷ An understanding of the European media's representation of the region and its issues, as well as the repercussions of these depictions within the public and political discourse, might therefore contribute to the understanding of the region's policies towards Asia and North Korea.

This study aims to shed some light on how North Korea is depicted in the European print media. For this purpose, newspapers from England, France, and Germany were chosen. The decision to focus on the print media (in contrast to television or the internet) was made in light of their comparatively influential nature and the ease of access to large amounts of structured source materials. The three countries were selected not because they are assumed to represent Europe as a whole, but rather because they are the most populous states within the European Union. As such, they are seen as the most representative within the limitations of this study. For the analysis of these newspapers, a special focus on stereotypes was chosen. While previous studies on North Korea's representation in the media, as well as the aforementioned criticism towards the media's reporting on the country, do not explicitly speak of stereotypes, the references to them are ubiquitous in both. In order to see whether these criticisms can equally be applied to the European media and to have a basis for comparisons, this analysis therefore takes stereotypes as a lens through which the media is surveyed.

The guiding research question of this study is the following: What stereotypes about North Korea are visible in the reporting of English, French, and German newspapers? In the first section, the given literature on the topic will be briefly reviewed. Then, the methodology of this article will be outlined, and its terminology defined. The results of the quantitative analysis will be presented in the third section, followed by a discussion of its findings.

6 See for example Seung-woo Kang, "EU to Help Denuclearize North Korea," *The Korea Times*, October 6, 2016, accessed October 20, 2016, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2016/10/116_215507.html.

7 See for example Mark Fitzpatrick, "North Korean Proliferation Challenges: The Role of the European Union," *EU Non-Proliferation Consortium Non-Proliferation Papers*, accessed October 20, 2016, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/EUNPC_no-18.pdf.

North Korea in the Media

The past decades have seen a number of studies on the depiction of North Korea in the media of other countries, and especially in South Korea, the United States, and China. To the knowledge of the authors, no prior study focused on the European media. Straightforward stereotypes are usually not the sole focus of the existing studies as most of them either analyze the general depiction of North Korea in specific media outlets, for example by comparing specific newspapers⁸, or by focusing on certain issue areas, for example the portrayal of North Korean living standards⁹ or the country's athletes at international sporting events.¹⁰ Nevertheless, many of these studies emphasize the ubiquity of stereotypes in the reporting on North Korea and outline how they form a persistent narrative.

In the past few years, several articles have focused on the depictions of North Korea in South Korean newspapers. In particular, these articles have shown how the ideological orientations of South Korean newspapers impact their depictions of the North. Kyung Hee Kim and Ghee Young Noh, for example, conclude that the representation of North Korea differs between conservative and progressive newspapers.¹¹ The former generally portrays North Korea as more hostile, less rational, and more distinct from South Korea than their progressive peers. Kim and Noh additionally emphasize the linkage between the newspapers' reporting and the production of generalizations and stereotypes in the audience.¹² Seung-Hee Ha and Min-Kyu Lee found congruent results regarding the effects of the news outlets' positions on the ideological spectrum when they analyzed the depiction of the North Korean population and its living conditions in several newspapers

8 See for example Kyung Hee Kim and Ghee Young Noh, "한국 신문사의 이념과 북한 보도방식에 대한 연구 'han-gug sin-mun-sa-ui i-nyeom-gwa bug-han bo-do-bang-sig-e dae-han yeon-gu' [A Comparative Study of News Reporting About North Korea on Newspapers in South Korea]," *Korean Journal of Journalism & Communication Studies* 55, no. 1 (2011): 361-87.

9 Seung-Hee Ha and Min-Kyu Lee, "북한주민 생활 실태에 관한 국내 신문보도 프레임연구: 조선일보, 동아일보, 한겨레, 경향신문을 중심으로 'bug-han-ju-min saeng-hwal sil-tae-e gwan-han gug-nae sin-mun-bo-do peu-le-im-yeon-gu: jo-seon-il-bo, dong-a-il-bo, han-gyeo-le, gyeong-hyang-sin-mun-eul jung-sim-eu-lo' [A News Frame Analysis by the South Korean Press on the Livelihoods of a North Koreans]," *Korean Journal of Communication & Information* 58 (2012): 222-41.

10 Liv Yoon and Brian Wilson, "'Nice Korea, Naughty Korea': Media framings of North Korea and the Inter-Korean Relationship in the London 2012 Olympic Games," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 51, no. 5 (2016): 505-28.

11 Kim and Noh, "한국 신문사의 이념과 북한 보도방식에 대한 연구."

12 Ibid., 362.

from South Korea.¹³ Both studies also show that newspapers give more or less credit to specific information sources depending on their ideological orientation; conservative publications cite anonymous sources as well as North Korean defectors more frequently, while progressive publications give more space to voices from the United States.

Other authors have analyzed the depiction of North Korea in the American media. With special attention to reporting on the 1994 Agreed Framework, Hugh Gusterson argues that the American print media presents a highly simplified and at times inaccurate image of North Korea and lists a number of elements that constitute “recurrent themes, stereotypes, metaphors, and storylines.”¹⁴ Among these are the portrayal of the country as backwards, its leaders as narcissistic, paranoid, and malicious, and the regime as untrustworthy. As Gusterson furthermore criticizes, expert opinions, voices from outside the United States, and especially the North Korean perspective, are routinely ignored in favor of crafting an entertaining story – which results in the media ultimately becoming a poor source of information for the public as well as for the political discourse on North Korea.¹⁵ The resulting narrative is usually the same regardless of the particular newspaper.

In a study of various American media outlets, Kyung Hye Kim finds a common practice of reporting on North Korea by linking it to certain other countries, regardless of their geographic locations or relations to each other.¹⁶ North Korea is therefore commonly presented with reference to Iran, Iraq, and Pakistan. These states are linked together through a narrative that presents them as “unpredictable, secretive, unfriendly, hostile, rogue and terrorist countries.”¹⁷ A similar focus was chosen by Jae Sik Ha in his study of the American media’s portrayal of Kim Jong-Il and former Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf in 2001 and 2002.¹⁸ Whereas the latter was

13 Ha and Lee, “북한주민 생활 실태에 관한 국내 신문보도 프레임연구: 조선일보, 동아일보, 한겨레, 경향신문을 중심으로.”

14 Hugh Gusterson, “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist Gets Nuclear Weapons: How the U.S. Print Media Cover North Korea,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 15, no. 1 (2008): 21-42.

15 *Ibid.*, 36.

16 Kyung Hye Kim, “Examining US News Media Discourses About North Korea: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis,” *Discourse & Society* 25, no. 2 (2014): 221-44.

17 *Ibid.*, 239.

18 Jae Sik Ha, “‘적(enemy)’과 ‘친구(friend)’의 차이: 파키스탄의 무사라프와 북한의 김정일에 대한 미국신문의 프레임 연구 ‘jeog(enemy)’gwa ‘chin-gu(friend)’ui cha-i: pa-ki-seu-tan-ui mu-sya-la-peu-wa bug-han-ui gim-jeong-il-e dae-han mi-gug-sin-mun-ui peu-le-i-ming yeon-gu’ [Framing dictators as ‘Enemy’ vs. ‘Friend’: Comparing Pervez Musharraf and Kim Jong-il in U.S. newspapers],” *Communication Science* 27, no. 1 (2010): 65-91.

seen as an ally and partner in the fight against terrorism, the North Korean ruler was clearly identified as an enemy. As Ha argues, the media's reporting therefore aligned itself with the prevalent political stance of the time and its understanding of the national interest.

Other authors come to equally critical conclusions about the American media and its representations of North Korea, even though these conclusions are usually not based on dedicated studies of the media's reporting. Hazel Smith perceives much of the media reporting (and scholarship) on the country defined by a "securitization prism"¹⁹ that focuses on military factors and perceives the North Korean regime as the exclusive source of the problems surrounding the country. As she argues, this perspective comes with the assumption that North Korea is either "bad" and driven by intrinsically evil intentions, or "mad" and acting in opposition to common logic.²⁰ Roland Bleiker shows a similarly critical attitude towards perceived simplifications and misrepresentations that can be found in the common narrative presented by the media: the "rhetoric of rogue states obstructs an adequate understanding of the security situation in Korea."²¹ The same argument is made by Sung-Yoon Lee, who links it to the common notion of an axis of evil with the prevalence of various myths about North Korea.²²

Beyond the American media, Hyung Gu Lynn has analyzed the depiction of North Korea in the Japanese TV media and its effects on public perceptions and ultimately on the political agenda. He argues that the media's persistent focus on certain topics, foremost of which are the abduction issue²³ and the threat of North Korean missiles, and their presentation in certain ways, caught the public eye as well as politics in a "self-perpetuating cycle of indignation and hate."²⁴ This allowed interest groups to establish a

19 Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944)* 76, no. 3 (2000): 593–617.

20 *Ibid.*, 597, 602.

21 Roland Bleiker, "A Rogue Is a Rogue Is a Rogue: US Foreign Policy and the Korean Nuclear Crisis," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 79, no. 4 (2003): 725.

22 Sung-Yoon Lee, "The Mythical Nuclear Kingdom of North Korea," *The Fletcher Forum of World Affairs* 29, no. 2 (2005): 125–44.

23 North Korea has officially admitted kidnapping 13 Japanese citizens between 1977 and 1983, and is suspected to have kidnapped many more. This issue is central to Japan's foreign relations with North Korea. For a discussion on how Japan and South Korea have dealt with the issue, see Brad Williams and Erik Mobrand, "Explaining Divergent Responses to the North Korean Abductions Issue in Japan and South Korea," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 2 (2010): 507–36.

24 Hyung Gu Lynn, "Vicarious Traumas: Television and Public Opinion in Japan's North Korea Policy," *Pacific Affairs* 79, no. 3 (2006): 508.

conservative agenda as the driving force in the relations between Japan and North Korea.²⁵ Other studies have focused on the Chinese-Korean media and especially on newspapers published in Korean for the ethnic Koreans living in China's Jilin Province. For two of them, Il-Wook Jeon analyzed the reporting on North and South Korea; he concluded for both Korea that the majority of articles are of a positive nature, although the percentage is notably higher in the case of reporting on the South.²⁶

It is noteworthy that these studies come to different conclusions about the relationship between depictions of North Korea in the media and among the political elites, and in particular regarding how the two influence each other. Gusterson implies that the former has the potential to misinform the public and thereby to push policymakers in a misguided direction by explaining, "I have felt that U.S. policy makers might be better off relying only on policy briefs and not reading even our best newspapers."²⁷ A number of other authors, for example Bleiker,²⁸ Smith,²⁹ Ha,³⁰ and Lee,³¹ merely state that the narratives presented by the media usually echo those by scholars and/or policymakers, and especially so in regards to the rhetoric and the vocabulary employed. Kim goes beyond this in her analysis and implies that the media's reporting on North Korea serves specific purposes and ultimately helps to "pursue the political ends of the political elite,"³² a view seemingly shared by Lynn.³³ In any case, the specific practices of reporting on North Korea are in various studies presented in a larger context and linked to actual policy issues.

Apart from these country-specific analyses of North Korea's representation in the media, a small number of studies have taken a

25 Ibid., 484.

26 See Il-Wook Jeon, "중국 언론매체(연변일보)의 보도내용 비교연구: 남북한 관련보도를 중심으로 'jung-gug eon-lon-mae-che(yeon-byeon-il-bo)ui bo-do-nae-yong bi-gyo-yeon-gu: nam-bug-han gwan-lyeon-bo-do-leul jung-sim-eu-lo' [A Carative(sic) Study of Chinese Media(sic) Rport(sic) (Yanbian Daily): Focusing on the Rports(sic) on North and South Korea]," *Journal of North-East Asian Studies* 17, no. 1 (2012): 241-264; Il-Wook Jeon, "중국 언론매체의 남북한 보도태도 비교연구: 길림신문을 중심으로 'jung-gug eon-lon-mae-che-ui nam-bug-han bo-do-tae-do bi-gyo-yeon-gu: gil-lim-sin-mun-eul jung-sim-eu-lo' [A Comparative Study of Chinese Media Report on North and South Korea, Focusing on Jilin Newspaper]," *Journal of Policy Sciences* 22, no. 2 (2013): 79-104.

27 Gusterson, "Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist," 36.

28 Bleiker, "A Rogue Is a Rogue," 725.

29 Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor?" 593.

30 Ha, "'적(enemy)'과 '친구(friend)'의 차이: 파키스탄의 무사라프와 북한의 김정일에 대한 미국신문의 프레임 연구," 87.

31 Lee, "The Mythical Nuclear Kingdom of North Korea," 131.

32 Kim, "Examining US News," 239.

33 Lynn, "Vicarious Traumas," 484.

comparative approach. Liv Yoon and Brian Wilson, for example, compared the reporting of South Korean and Western print and online media on North Korea and the inter-Korean relationship during the 2012 Olympic Games in London.³⁴ As they concluded, the Western media gave more attention to the conflicts as well as problems surrounding North Korea and showcased a dismissive attitude towards the performances of its athletes, while the reporting in South Korea gave more attention to these athletic achievements. Another example of a comparative approach can be found in a study by Ban, Baek, and Kim, who analyzed the media's framing of the 2006 North Korean nuclear crisis over time for both American as well as South Korean newspapers and their relative impact on their respective audiences.³⁵

The media depiction of North Korea in the country's abutters and the United States has thereby received attention in a variety of studies. The situation in the European media, on the other hand, has so far not been considered. This study therefore aims to explore this perspective and provide a foundation for future comparative works researching the representation of North Korea beyond the peninsula's neighbors and the United States.

Research Methodology

In order to analyze the depictions visible in the European media's reporting on North Korea, six newspapers from three countries were selected: England, France, and Germany. These countries were chosen based on their relative size within Europe. The selection criteria for the specific newspapers required that they should be reasonably influential and available nationwide, generally perceived to be from different sides of the political spectrum, and that the researchers were able to gain access to full-text archives. The selected newspapers include: *The Guardian* (center-left) and *The Times* (center-right) from the United Kingdom; *Frankfurter Rundschau* (thereafter "Rundschau" – center-left) and *Die Welt* (center-right) from Germany; and *Le Monde* (center-left) and *Le Figaro* (right) from France. Of interest for this study were all articles published by these newspapers over the course of 2014.

34 Liv Yoon and Brian Wilson, "'Nice Korea, Naughty Korea.'"

35 Hyun Ban, Kanghui Baek, and Soo Jung Kim, "한미 (韓美) 언론의 북핵 위기 프레임; 효과 연구 - 미디어 프레임, 수용자 프레임, 그리고 스키마를 중심으로 'han-mi (韓美) eon-lon-ui bug-haeg wi-gi peu-le-im; hyo-gwa yeon-gug - mi-di-eo peu-le-im, su-yong-ja peu-le-im, geu-li-go seu-ki-ma-leul jung-sim-eu-lo' [Framing North Korea's Nuclear Crisis - Comparing the Media and Audiences' Frames in U.S. and South Korea]," *Journal of Political Communication* 17 (2010): 123-168.

The decision for this particular year was made to ensure timely relevance of the results. While it saw a number of unusual North Korea-related events—for example, the release of the film *The Interview* and the vanishing of Kim Jong Un for several weeks—the preceding years equally had specific, unprecedented events. One limitation of the research presented here might therefore be that the results vary depending on the year analyzed.

In a first step, via the LexisNexis media database, all articles published by the six newspapers during 2014 that contained one or multiple occurrences of specific keywords were selected. These keywords were “North Korea,” “Pyongyang,” “Kim Jong-un,” “Kim Jong-il,” and “Kim Il-sung,” including their variant spellings, to take into account both different romanization systems and the differences depending on the newspapers’ languages. This search yielded a total of 1,298 individual articles, with 729 of these from the English newspapers, 302 from German ones, and 267 from the French ones. Not all of these articles are necessarily about North Korea, but at least refer to it by name. Table 1, hereafter, provides a breakdown of the different articles by newspaper.

TABLE 1 Breakdown of Articles (by Newspaper)

<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Die Welt</i>	<i>Rundschau</i>	<i>Le Figaro</i>	<i>Le Monde</i>	Total
374	355	189	113	132	135	1298

In a second step, all 1,298 articles were read and coded for which stereotypical depictions occur in them (with the possibility of multiple or no stereotypes occurring in an article). The exclusive focus lay on the text of the articles; images and illustrations were not taken into account. This process did not rely on an existing list of stereotypes or guiding hypotheses, in part because the variety of approaches in the existing studies on the topic make it hard to discern a set of common results that could be the basis for comparison. In the sense of Grounded Theory approaches, the goal was the open-ended discovery of stereotypes within the data and thereby theory generation in contrast to theory testing.³⁶ Over the course of this process, a preliminary list of stereotypes was created and constantly adapted if new information required so. In case of ambiguities or the absence of a fitting stereotype on the list, the researchers consulted and adapted the list as

36 See Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*, 7th Paperback Printing (New Brunswick: Aldine, 2012), 28.

necessary.

As two researchers analyzed the articles, several indicators were computed to ensure intercoder reliability. Over all articles and stereotypes, the agreement percentage was 90.8 percent, while Scott's Pi and Cohen's Kappa were both 0.672. These numbers are generally seen as an indicator for good intercoder reliability. Eventually, only stereotypes visible in at least 10 percent of the analyzed articles of at least one newspaper were kept on the list. Articles that came up several times in the LexisNexis output were analyzed as if they were distinct articles based on the assumption that they were published several times in different locations (i.e. some articles would have an excerpt printed on the front page with the rest printed further inside).

This analysis was guided by a number of assumptions about stereotypes. The literature knows a variety of distinct definitions for the term, which despite various nuances revolve around a similar understanding: stereotypes exemplify the "qualities perceived to reflect the essence of a group."³⁷ At their core, stereotypes are a "socially-constructed mental pigeon-hole into which events and individuals can be sorted, thereby making such events and individuals comprehensible"; and which provide us with "categories which we project on the world in order to make sense of it."³⁸ A more practical definition, and the one we use here, is that stereotypes are "simply generalizations about groups of people."³⁹ These stereotypes, therefore, occur not only in newspaper articles about North Korea specifically, but can also originate from texts that merely refer to the country, such as, to elaborate on a different issue via a comparison to North Korea.

As a variety of authors stress, the academic understanding of stereotypes does not necessarily equal the common use of the term. While it is often linked to concepts such as prejudice, discrimination, and stigma,⁴⁰ stereotypes do not necessarily describe a group in negative terms. While they usually generalize and may oftentimes contain errors, they are not necessarily factually wrong. This understanding of stereotypes has been adopted by a number of other researchers, such as a study on stereotypes

37 John F. Dovidio et al., "Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination: Theoretical and Empirical Overview," in *The SAGE Handbook of Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination*, eds. John F. Dovidio et al. (London: SAGE, 2010), 8.

38 Roger Fowler, *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, 12th Edition (New York: Routledge, 2013), 17.

39 David Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2005), 562.

40 See John F. Dovidio et al., "Prejudice, Stereotyping and Discrimination"; Paul Martin Lester and Susan Dente Ross, *Images That Injure: Pictorial Stereotypes in the Media* (Santa Barbara, CA: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003), 20.

about Germany visible in the British print media.⁴¹

This use of the term stereotype is therefore close to the common understanding of what a generalization is. Yet, as David Schneider emphasizes, the two concepts differ in their degree of complexity and cultural embeddedness. Generalizations are commonly used for objects instead of people, and stereotypes tend to “have profound consequences for our social behavior.”⁴² Especially due to the latter point, this paper therefore speaks of stereotypes instead of generalizations. The literature additionally emphasizes that many stereotypes are held unconsciously and are therefore hard to recognize, to control, and to change, as well as to avoid.

In the context of this analysis, it is worth emphasizing that the presence of stereotypes in the media’s reporting on North Korea can go beyond blunt simplifications. The statement that “all North Koreans suffer from famine” is certainly a stereotype, yet it also constitutes stereotypical reporting if the majority of all articles on North Korea focus on the belligerent rhetoric of the country’s government, even though this stereotype is not expressed in a single phrase. After all, stereotypes are also created through the choice of what to report on, through the sources that are claimed to be reliable, and the contextual knowledge provided in articles.

Results

The primary result of this study is a list of nine stereotypes about North Korea visible in the six analyzed newspapers. Their number and content are inevitably contentious and a result of the authors’ intent to produce a list that is both comprehensive and parsimonious. Stereotype 5, for example, depicts North Korea as a threat. This could have easily been split into separate stereotypes for the depictions of North Korea as a nuclear and a cyber threat. At the same time, this stereotype could have potentially been merged with Stereotype 4 and the depiction of North Korea as belligerent.

41 Jonathan Grix and Chantal Lacroix, “Constructing Germany’s Image in the British Press: An Empirical Analysis of Stereotypical Reporting on Germany,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 14, no. 3 (2006): 373–392.

42 Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 564.

Stereotype 1: North Korea is an oppressive dictatorship.

The country is led by its dictator Kim Jong-un who holds absolute authority over decision making. The government practices dynasticism, restricts civil liberties (freedom of press, expression, movement, etc.) of its citizens, and exercises wide-ranging control over their everyday lives. Kim is usually referred to in the analyzed articles as “dictator” or “leader” and almost never by any of his political titles (as is the case for decision makers in other countries). The stereotype is also visible in the common usage of North Korea as the archetypical standard for non-democratic governance as visible in this quote:

Three months after the bloody purge of his uncle Chang Song-taek, Kim Jon-Eun rules without anyone to contest him. [...] The brutal execution of the party’s previous number two, December 12th, after a swift trial has eliminated the only person able to challenge the young dictator-wannabee raised in Switzerland.⁴³

Stereotype 2: North Korea is a humanitarian failure.

This stereotype includes not only references to extreme poverty and famine and the scarcity of goods and resources (such as medical supplies), but also the reliance of North Korea on foreign aid to feed its population. This element of North Korea’s portrayal is frequently presented as a matter of fact that needs no further elaboration, such as through statistical data; at other times, it is illustrated through anecdotes:

Money, in this year of famine, is much needed in Korea. ‘Everybody was very gaunt. One of my [North Korean] guides would ingest so much food during official dinners that we had to help him vomit everything when were done with our food.’⁴⁴

43 Sébastien Falletti, “Corée du Nord: Kim Jong-un assoit son pouvoir absolu,” *Le Figaro*, March 10, 2014, translated by the authors.

44 Serge Michel, “Transnistrie, la preuve par l’image,” *Le Monde*, November 1, 2014, translated by the authors.

Stereotype 3: North Korea commits crimes against humanity.

Unlike Stereotype 1, which includes comparatively “softer” restrictions on the welfare of the North Korean population, this stereotype focuses on laws and practices affecting directly the chances of survival of individuals. It also includes any reference to North Korea as being “malicious” or “evil,” as well as comparisons to the Nazi regime and its practices. For example, articles on the UN report published in early 2014 frequently featured this stereotype, often describing gruesome details of North Korea’s crimes against humanity:

The UN report on the human rights situation in North Korea earlier this year contained almost unreadable details of life for the estimated 80,000-120,000 political prisoners. One former inmate told the panel his duties involved burning the bodies of those who had starved to death and using the remains as fertilizer. Another watched a female prisoner forced by guards to drown her new born baby in a bucket because it was presumed to have a Chinese father.⁴⁵

Stereotype 4: North Korea is belligerent.

This stereotype encompasses hostile and aggressive practices of international significance, both in terms of rhetoric and military practices, such as castigations of the South Korean leadership, military provocations, and specific references to the militaristic nature of the country. This is commonly illustrated with quotes from official statements by the North Korean government, such as:

Mr. Fowle is the third American currently held in the country, which does not have formal diplomatic relations with the US and which threatened last year to turn Washington into a ‘sea of fire’ with atomic weapons.⁴⁶

45 Peter Walker, “The ‘I’m so ronery’ jokes mask the real evil of North Korea; The horror of a recent UN report on North Korea punctures the quirky Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un representations of Team America and The Interview for good,” *The Guardian*, December 23, 2014.

46 Leo Lewis, “North Koreans Arrest US Tourist,” *The Times* (London), June 7, 2014.

Stereotype 5: North Korea is a threat.

North Korea's military, including its nuclear and cyber capabilities, are posing a threat to foreign nations, especially the United States and South Korea, as well as their allies, industry, and even lifestyle. Of special importance is the fact that the threat posed by North Korea is generally assumed to be a matter of fact, rarely questioned, and presented without further analysis of context and intentions:

Japan and the Philippines are locked in territorial disputes with China, while tensions between South Korea and Japan affect partnerships on security, including the nuclear threat from North Korea, which called the Obama trip 'reactionary and dangerous.'⁴⁷

Stereotype 6: North Korea is an international outcast.

The country does not conform to the norms of international society, suffers from sanctions, and is isolated from other nations. This includes the lack of normalized relations with other nations as well as North Korean actions that go against the *zeitgeist* of the international society, including selling arms or kidnapping foreign citizens. An example for this stereotype is the following depiction of the government's status:

But the internationally isolated and outlawed leadership in Pyongyang, which is heavily sanctioned by the UN due to its nuclear and rocket tests and which is about to be denounced for the first time by the United Nations due to its especially gruesome human rights violations, follows its own rational.⁴⁸

Stereotype 7: North Korea is an enigma.

This stereotype consists of references to how difficult it is to get reliable information on North Korea, its leadership, and the situation on the ground.

47 David Taylor, "Obama Heads East on Trip to Smooth Asian Rivalries," *The Times* (London), April 22, 2014.

48 Johnny Erling, "Kims Kalkül: Amerikaner sind frei; Nordkorea entlässt die letzten beiden US-Bürger aus der Haft. Geheimdienstchef Clapper brachte Brief Obamas nach Pjöngjang," *Die Welt*, November 10, 2014, translated by the authors.

As in the following quote, this is at times used to qualify – and express uncertainty about – the information presented:

According to North Korea watchers, who scrutinise the smallest of signals from the isolated and secretive state, Mr. Kim has engaged in a programme of promotions, demotions and re-promotions of senior army officers, in a bizarre military version of snakes and ladders.⁴⁹

Stereotype 8: North Korea is an object of ridicule.

While mostly consisting of jokes at the expense of Kim Jong-un, this section also includes references to the presumably weird or bizarre characteristics of the regime. While this stereotype occurs frequently in a wide range of articles, it is especially present in reporting focused exclusively on North Korean absurdities:

Kim's latest (non-nuclear) mission shows he's a real funghi: Its most recent, and slightly dubious, discoveries were a lair for unicorns and waterproofing liquid. Now the world's most secretive state claims to have given the globe a brand new first: a sports drink made from mushroom fungus.⁵⁰

Stereotype 9: North Korea has a special relationship with the People's Republic of China.

This stereotype comprises references to the support granted by the PRC to its proclaimed ally, the strategic position of the North Korean state in China's East Asian strategy, and references to China as having a special influence on North Korea's actions. This depiction frequently casts North Korea as ultimately dependent on – and lacking agency beyond that granted by – Beijing:

To fend off further cyber attacks, the United States asked its arch

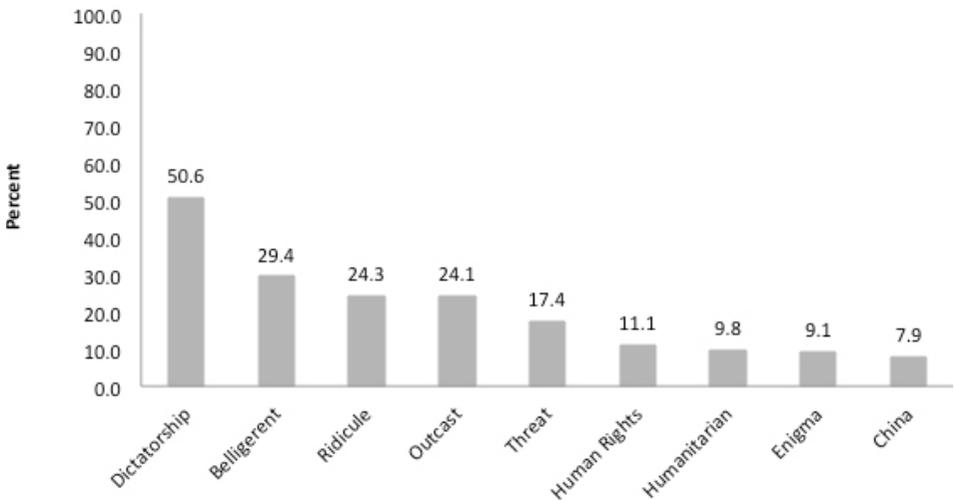
49 Richard Lloyd Parry, "Kim Plays 'Snakes and Ladders' with His Generals," *The Times* (London), February 12, 2014.

50 Robin Pagnamenta, "Kim's Latest (Non-Nuclear) Mission Shows He's a Real Funghi," *The Times* (London), May 31, 2014.

rival and North Korea-ally China for ‘cooperation,’ as a spokesman of the government said.⁵¹

Across all the 1,298 analyzed articles from the six newspapers, the most common stereotype about North Korea concerns its authoritarian and dictatorial nature (Stereotype 1). It is visible in slightly more than half of all articles (50.6 percent) and thereby in almost twice as many times as the second most prevalent stereotype. North Korea as belligerent (Stereotype 4) appears in slightly less than one third of articles (29.4 percent), while the nature of the state as an object of ridicule (Stereotype 8) and as an outcast (Stereotype 6) both appear in roughly one out of four texts - that is in 24.3 percent and 24.1 percent of all articles, respectively. North Korea is represented as a threat (Stereotype 5) in 17.4 percent of all articles. The suffering of the North Korean people is addressed in terms of human rights abuses (Stereotype 3) and humanitarian failure (Stereotype 2) in 11.1 percent and 9.8 percent of the articles, respectively. The enigmatic nature of North Korea (Stereotype 8) is also mentioned at a similar frequency (9.1 percent). Ranking last is the special relation North Korea has with China (Stereotype 9), which is only highlighted in 7.9 percent of all articles; it owes its inclusion in this list only to the occurrences in articles from the French newspapers.

FIGURE 1 Frequency of Stereotypes Across All Analyzed Articles



51 “Nordkorea droht mit Cyber-Krieg,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 22, 2014, translated by the authors.

On average, each of the analyzed articles contained slightly less than two stereotypical depictions of North Korea (on average 1.87 stereotypes per article). This number varies only slightly across newspapers; the only exception is the *Rundschau* where on average only 1.60 stereotypes are visible per article. When the newspapers are grouped by country, the differences in the average number of stereotypes per article are equally small (see *Table 2*). Of the articles surveyed, only 151 (11.6 percent) contained no stereotypes from our list, most of which mention North Korea only in passing.

TABLE 2 Average Number of Stereotypes per Article by Newspaper

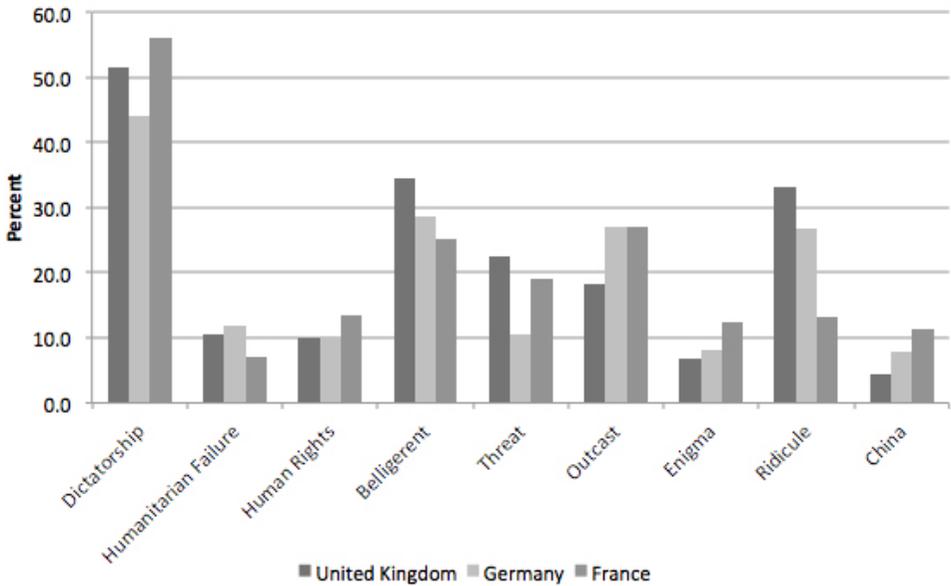
<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>The Times</i>	<i>Die Welt</i>	<i>Runschau</i>	<i>Le Figaro</i>	<i>Le Monde</i>	Average
2.01	1.83	1.89	1.60	1.83	1.87	1.87

TABLE 3 Average Number of Stereotypes per Article by Country

United Kingdom	Germany	France
1.92	1.75	1.85

The frequency of specific stereotypes' occurrence is relatively similar across the analyzed newspapers and their countries of origin. It is noteworthy that there are no significant differences in the occurrence of the stereotypes depending on whether the analyzed newspapers are considered progressive/ liberal or conservative. At the same time, there are cases in which the portrayal of North Korea varies depending on the newspaper and the country (even though the overall frequency is similar). These differences are most pronounced in the case of Stereotype 8 and the depiction of North Korea as an object of ridicule. Its frequency varies from 8.9 percent of articles in *Le Monde* to 35.6 percent in *The Guardian*. Furthermore there is a pattern visible with British newspapers showcasing the most ridicule and French publications comparatively little. Differences are also visible for the case of Stereotype 5 and the depiction of North Korea as a threat. While it occurs in slightly more than a fifth of the articles from British and French newspapers, it is only present in roughly one in ten articles from the two German sources. But, as the focus of this analysis lies on the depiction of North Korea in the European print media in general, we refrain at this point from possibly over-interpreting these differences based on newspapers' countries of origin.

FIGURE 2 Frequency of Stereotypes in Articles of Reviewed Newspapers by Country



Findings

General Finding 1: The stereotypical picture of North Korea in the analyzed newspapers is one of an authoritarian dictatorship that is isolated on the international stage and showcases a belligerent stance in dealing with the world.

This narrative usually comes with several noteworthy characteristics, specifically that all analyzed newspapers make use of this narrative, regardless of their country of origin and political orientation. Similar to the narrative visible in American print media, Gunderson observes, “Whichever newspaper one reads, ‘the story’ is roughly the same.”⁵² While there are differences in the stereotypes they employ (see below), they are less pronounced than is the case for South Korean newspapers.⁵³ This might reflect the fact that North Korea and the engagement with it is not a

⁵² Gusterson, “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist,” 29.

⁵³ Kim and Noh, “한국 신문사의 이념과 북한 보도방식에 대한 연구,” 362; see also Ha and Lee, “북한주민 생활 실태에 관한 국내 신문보도 프레임연구: 조선일보, 동아일보, 한겨레, 경향신문을 중심으로.”

particularly divisive issue in the three countries this study looks at (which stands in marked contrast to the situation in South Korea).

In the context of this overarching narrative, equally noteworthy is the portrayal of Kim Jong-un as yielding absolute power, having a role in all decisions made, and being the only actual agent in North Korea. The population is ascribed an exclusively passive role; even the elites surrounding the dictator only appear in relation to him and his actions. A common stereotype about North Korea is hence the idea that “L’État, c’est Kim” and that North Korea as a dictatorship plays in a league of its own internationally. This goes hand-in-hand with the depiction of the government as illegitimate. With singular exceptions, none of the articles analyzed refer to Kim with any of his political titles and usually label him as “dictator,” “leader,” or “ruler.” Combined with repeated ridicule of Kim and those surrounding him, this is a testament to the unique degree of contempt held by journalists towards the North Korean head of state.⁵⁴

While the reporting thereby focuses on a single person, a third characteristic of this dominant narrative is that usually no explicit information about Kim’s rationale and motivations is provided. This represents a broader trend of superficial reporting that does not delve into the history of North Korea or its internal affairs – and ultimately the underpinnings of its behavior. In this sense, the focus of the analyzed European newspaper articles lies much more on mere reporting rather than explaining. To employ the terminology introduced by Smith, the analyzed articles hence make few explicit assumptions about whether the country and its leadership is a bad, mad, or sad actor.⁵⁵ At the same time, the question arises whether this absence of clear information in combination with stereotypes that depict North Korea as belligerent and run by a despicable, and at times ridiculous, dictator ultimately evoke certain impressions upon the audience on their own.

Another aspect of Smith’s argument is clearly visible: the “securitization paradigm” through which all issues relating to North Korea are seen through a lens that emphasizes military power, threats, and security. Depending on the newspaper, roughly a fourth to a third of all articles depict North Korea as belligerent, and especially so in the context of its cyber warfare capabilities and the nuclear program. One of the dominant themes in the analyzed newspapers’ reporting on North Korea

54 See Gusterson, “Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist,” 30.

55 Smith, “Bad, Mad, Sad or Rational Actor?”

are therefore the effects of the country's actions on the security of other nations. Yet, this depiction as belligerent does not necessarily translate into that of an actual threat. A potential danger for European countries and their citizens is visible in virtually none of the analyzed articles. Over the course of 2014, the only threat implied came from the belligerent North Korean reaction to the release of the film *The Interview*. In a number of cases, the bellicose rhetoric of North Korea is even explicitly called out for not going beyond mere words. Even the country's nuclear weapons are commonly treated in a matter-of-fact fashion without any portrayal of an imminent danger.

General Finding 2: Humanitarian issues receive comparatively little attention

Across all newspapers, the humanitarian situation in North Korea as well as the behavior of the government in this context occupy less space than reporting on the Kim regime, its belligerence, and its quirks. This ties in with the "securitization paradigm" and the observation that the reporting focuses on the man in power, not the wider population (see above). It also confirms what can be observed in the coverage of North Korea by the wider English-language press. The study by Gusterson,⁵⁶ for example, does not even mention humanitarian issues as a significant part of their reporting on North Korea. An obvious explanation for this relative absence is that there are fewer "newsworthy" developments in the context of humanitarian and human rights issues. As the reporting on the release of the UN Commission's report on North Korea illustrates, these topics become visible in the newspapers' reporting only once new material becomes available.

While humanitarian issues thereby occupy comparatively little space, all six analyzed newspapers nevertheless showcase a clear stance in this context. North Korea is commonly depicted as "the worst place on earth"⁵⁷ whenever this side of the country is brought up. This depiction is oftentimes linked to the Kim family whose members are, for one, described as directly responsible for the situation and, secondly, put in absolute contrast to this suffering via references to their life in luxury. Once again, this depiction puts the ruling family into focus and relates all

⁵⁶ Gusterson, "Paranoid, Potbellied Stalinist."

⁵⁷ Cha, *The Impossible State*, 166.

other things in North Korea back to them.

We got used to Kim Jong-Un being one of the bad guys. [...] His people starve while he feasts and whores and splurges on weapons just like his father did before him.⁵⁸

General Finding 3: The portrayal of North Korea does not vary depending on the ideological dispositions of the analyzed newspapers.

In contrast to the results of several studies about the depiction of North Korea in South Korean newspapers, the occurrence and content of the stereotypes found here do not vary depending on newspapers' position on the ideological spectrum. One obvious explanation is that the European discourse on North Korea is far less shaped by ideological cleavages than is the case in South Korea.

General Finding 4: North Korea is usually not depicted as collapsing or irrational – contrary to the prevalent view that this is part of the common knowledge about the country.

While the articles analyzed describe North Korea as poor, backward, and dependent on Chinese support, there is no larger narrative illustrating that the government is losing power or the country is on the verge of collapse. This is furthermore expressed in the depiction of the North Korean population as passive, and thereby devoid of any bottom-up threat to the regime. The dire situation of the population is consequently not extended to the state of the country as a whole, as argued by David Shim and Dirk Nabers in their analysis of North Korea's visual representation in the media.⁵⁹ In similar contrast to another argument made elsewhere, the government is at times depicted as strange and prone to emotional outbursts, yet there is no overarching narrative according to which it defies rationality or is "crazy." In fact, a number of articles seek to rationalize the behavior of North Korea:

58 Sophie Mühlmann, "Polit-Porno Nordkorea - Was mancher skurril oder cool findet, ist die übelste Diktatur der Welt," *Die Welt*, February 19, 2014, translated by the authors.

59 Dirk Nabers, and David Shim, "North Korea and the Politics of Visual Representation," *GIGA Working Paper No. 164* (2011): 14, accessed November 12, 2015, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1823289.

What did Sony think it was doing by allowing the movie to be made in the first place? Did it not anticipate that there would be a backlash? The plot, which involves the CIA encouraging two journalists to assassinate Kim, could not be more controversial. It was bound to provoke anger. And an angry rogue was unlikely to turn the other cheek.⁶⁰

The absence of stereotypes about North Korea's weakness and irrationality calls into question whether the picture of the country promoted by the media is as biased by these stereotypes as oftentimes claimed.⁶¹ This criticism usually targets the English-language and specifically the American media. The results of this study imply that it might not apply to the reporting on North Korea in European newspapers.

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to shine light on the stereotypes found in European newspapers in their reporting on North Korea. As was previously noted, stereotypes are an inevitability, possibly even a necessity, and can be both correct and incorrect. Consequently, this text merely aims to analyze, not judge, the newspapers' coverage. Against this backdrop, three results of this analysis are especially noteworthy. First, the coverage of North Korea is remarkably similar across the newspapers in focus here. Their country of origin as well as their political orientation seem to have little effect on the narrative and the stereotypes they display. A possible explanation is that the discourse on North Korea is far less contentious and polarized—and thereby less politicized—in Europe than in other places, especially in South Korea and the United States.

Second, the stereotypes on display paint a picture of North Korea in which certain elements are more dominant than others. Among these are the dictatorial character of the country, the strong focus on Kim Jong-Un, the international isolation of the country, and its belligerent rhetoric. In contrast, the depiction of North Korea as a threat, as an object of ridicule, and especially as a humanitarian disaster receives less attention. North Korea is therefore portrayed, first and foremost, as a loudmouthed and

60 Roy Greenslade, "Why Did Sony Pictures Make a Movie About Assassinating Kim Jong-Un?," *The Guardian*, December 18, 2014.

61 See Cumings, *North Korea*, xii; Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, xi.

isolated dictatorship, and only after that as a security threat, a joke, or a tragedy. Furthermore, few assumptions are made about underlying rationale and interests, and beyond articles poking fun at the regime, few depict the country as crazy or mad. One implication is that the common criticism from academics and pundits about the depiction of North Korea as irrational might not necessarily hold true in the case of European newspapers.

Finally, the depiction of North Korea in European newspapers appears to be different from those in the United States and South Korea. While a precise comparison is difficult due to a lack of empirical data, the depiction of North Korea as a threat, a joke, and a crazy rogue seems to be less frequent in the articles analyzed here than elsewhere. The European portrayal of the country can therefore be viewed as less hysterical, concerned, and ideologically driven than elsewhere – which might be a mirror image of the actual relationships of Britain, Germany, and France with North Korea. This is not to say that the result is necessarily a realistic and unbiased picture of the country, but possibly one that comes from a more detached perspective than in countries with an immediate stake in North Korea, whether due to geographic or security reasons. Media reporting and political realities might therefore correspond to some degree, although it remains open whether and how these two factors determine each other.

These results come with a number of caveats. One is that the focus on print media excludes television and the internet, and thus the news sources that are of possibly more relevant today. Further, the sample size of six newspapers from three countries is obviously limited and can provide only qualified findings. Third, and as was mentioned before, only publications from 2014 were taken into account. The specific events from this year – among them no large-scale security crisis but odd happenings such as the dispute about *The Interview* – certainly shaped the newspaper reporting and the results of this analysis. Finally, the focus on the articles' text inevitably excluded images, illustrations, and caricatures, and consequently aspects of reporting in European newspapers that certainly have their own effect on the audience.⁶² In conclusion, further research is necessary to explore the depictions of North Korea in other media, in other countries, and ultimately in comparison to the results presented here. **Y**

62 See Nabers and Shim, "North Korea and the Politics of Visual Representation."