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Ruins, Memory and Vibrant Matter: Imagining Future North Korean Rural Terrains -

From Pyongyang's urban spaces, Taegyedeo's coast to Mt Paektu's sacred architectures, North Korea's topographies have long been harnessed in support of its politics. North Korea's nature(s) have long served its politico-developmental narratives, forged and reconstructed as new 'socialist' landscapes with geo-political connections. North Korea's politics and ideology becomes one with its commemorative and memorial traditions, in some cases vital elements within them, part of national terrain. While this enmeshing of nature with North Korea's 'Web of Life', its economics, politics, human interactions and institutional structures may be for distinct ideological goals, commonalities of degradation and denudation are shared with landscapes globally. In this era of environmental and climate crisis all human made landscapes might be considered essentially ruins. North Korea's environment is in ruins in similar fashion to the smogs and hazes of Beijing and the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, representatives of marine and atmospheric ruination. However, building on recent work from Jason Moore (2015), Edensor and DeSilvey (2012 and Bennett (2012) in *Critical and Human Geography and Philosophy*, this paper does not hold ruination to be entirely negative. All natures co-produced by humans and the global environment in the 'Web of Life' are in the process of either becoming ruins or being transformed from having been ruins, all are vibrant, active, lively matters in flux. While Pyongyang and North Korea's landscapes may be subjectively ruined by their interactions with its politics and ideology, an alternative view may be that they have become ruins only for this temporal moment. Later in history North Korean spaces will once again begin the process of transformation from ruination.

With this thinking on ruins as lively matters, in process and becoming in mind the paper considers North Korea's non-urban landscapes currently deeply marked by history, from a temporal (and spatial) frame beyond that of Pyongyang's sovereignty. Following a unification of the Korean Peninsula in which North Korea as we know it ceases to exist, how will both state bureaucracy and popular cultural power impact on terrains so heavily transformed by the ideology and political culture of North Korea. Will post-unification forces consider architectures of ideological memory entirely ruined, attempt to write their own cultures and memories on these spaces, or unwrite previous ones, co-producing new landscapes of memory on the Korean Peninsula? In particular, this paper examines physical and material futures for two important sites in North Korea. Firstly the Samjiyon Grand Monument and the Birch Trees of Lake Samji, representative within North Korea's historical narrative of both military struggles in the area and the first acknowledgement of Kim Il Sung and his first wife, Kim Jong Suk's relationship. Secondly the paper considers Mt. Paektu and very specifically the Secret Guerrilla Camp below it, and Jong Il Peak, part of the mountain now graced by Kim Jong Il's signature written in huge Korean script. Both sites, along with North Korea's wider rural and wild spaces are in a sense ruined by their enmeshing with the political narratives of Pyongyang. However, in their ruination the paper sees the unpicking and untwining of this state, through the processes of time and cultural-political configuration.

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“Nostalgia for Socialism has become a commodity, but not for those who still live in its ruins, because they are at home.” (Lahusen, 2006)

While this paper and the panel in which it sits deploy the imagination both as methodological tool and conceptual frame, the landscapes on which it focuses are not themselves of the imagination. While North Korean history, mythology and politics can often seem rooted in an ideological imagination built up over many years deep within its institutional mind, its terrains are not imagined. North Korea’s material and historical presence deeply affects the landscapes of the country from which this presentation is delivered, it even deeply affects the emotional, political and security landscapes of the country in which I write the paper on which this presentation is based. They are not matters of the past and memory as much as they are matters of imagination. They are real, present and material, as much as the landscapes in which we sit today and through which we had to travel through to get here. Much analysis and writing on North Korea in recent years has centred on the desires or aspirations for its landscapes to no longer be real, to be deconstructed, reconfigured, destroyed even. While these desires may particularly focus on North Korea’s military, fissile or nuclear landscapes, it cannot be denied that consigning the entirety of what are currently terrains under Pyongyang’s control and sovereignty to the realm of memory and the past is also sought and dreamed of by many. It would in a sense make a great number of people across the globe very happy indeed if North Korea were no longer there, if it ceased to exist. Problematic to all of these desires and imagination however is the fact these dreams for North Korea to become a figment of memory for the most part both lack imagination and focus as to what that temporal shift would mean for the landscapes and their inhabitants themselves. While many desire the ruination of North Korea and its consignment to memory, what exactly might a ruined North Korea or a ruin of North Korea look like as well as what will be remembered and how will memory operate in the context of its ruination is not clear.

This paper cannot possibly hope to have all of the answers, it cannot even hope to have most of the answers; in fact it does not seek to. This paper will not address all North Korean landscapes, in fact similarly it will not attempt to. There are many examples in this panel of work addressing imaginative ideas on North Korean urban spaces, in particular Pyongyang with its dense agglomeration of monumental and dramatic architectures has received the lion’s share of interest so far as the future is concerned. It would of course be the same if the panel focused on South Korea and Seoul and its landscapes of consumption and consumerism were the object of our concern. In contrast this paper moves beyond the city and the urban, beyond the vast majority of North Korea’s population to places and spaces in its rural hinterland, terrains in the span of Korean history once decidedly wild, but now

very much part of the nation's political narratives. In particular this paper considers places in Ryanggang Province such as Samjiyon, the Samjiyon Grand Monument and the various memorial landscapes surrounding Mt Paektu. While these places are not populated in a conventional sense and are peripheral in comparison to the urban population centres of North Korea, they are not peripheral to its politics. Once wild, rural places have through the course of the nation's history become key points in both North Korea's memory and in its ideological narratives. However as much as they are important and central to Pyongyang's politics they are also for the most part wild, undeveloped topographies in which natural features form a large part. Natural features however on which both politics and memory have been written and marked. One might say these beautiful natural spaces with their once pristine topographies and ecologies have been ruined by North Korean politics, so in part they are already ruins. In the political frame in which they currently exist it is unacceptable for them to be ruined, decayed or damaged, they must be pristine...but with some imagination must they always?

This paper therefore ventures some distance from the conventional methodological and conceptual byways along which consideration of North Korean matters normally travels. At this intersection of politics, memory, geography and imagination some account must be given of the theoretical and literature frames on which this paper depends. Firstly in considering in North Korea's politics and ideology the paper moves beyond Weber's theorisation and triangulates with anthropologist Clifford Geertz's analysis of the place of theatre and performance within the process of sovereign and political activity in 19th Century Negara-era Baliⁱⁱ and Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung's landmark work in the field *Beyond Charismatic Politics*ⁱⁱⁱ, which brought an analysis of the theatricality of current North Korean political forms to the foreground, identifying what they termed North Korea's 'theatric politics.' Kwon and Chung's work made clear North Korea's developmental narratives of both urban and rural, past, present and future allow its charismatic politics to spill out beyond the realm of conventional political interaction, marking and reconstructing both physical topography and historical or culture narrative. With Kwon and Chung's work in mind this author has further suggested that if all politics is theatre, it will be necessary to redesign or reconfigure the stage and terrain in which that politics performs. The paper thus uses the Weber/Geertz/Kwon and Chung's triangulation in conjunction with the sociogeographic work of Denis Cosgrove^{iv} and Noel Castree^v and their analysis of landscape and landscape development from a constructivist perspective asserting that landscapes, terrains and nature themselves are constructed and built by the societies and political forms that inhabit them. Using the theoretic legacy of Cosgrove and Castree the author asserts that not only in North Korea is there a charismatic politics, but that this perhaps necessarily begets through the social and political processes of construction a charismatic landscape

The paper the uses methodological tools from political and human geography in order to best function and organisation of politics within that charismatic landscape, firstly analyse the use of processes of

scale or scaling^{vi}. Originally deriving from Cartography scholars have built on Henri Lefebvre's assertion that space and spatiality themselves are products, social products or political products^{vii}. Eric Swyngedouw for example suggests that places represented or experienced through scales are "the embodiment of social relations of empowerment and disempowerment and the arena through and in which they operate"^{viii}, and Marston has asserted that "...scale making is not only a rhetorical practice; its consequences are inscribed in and are the outcome of, both everyday life and macro-level social structures..."^{ix}. Swyngedouw in particular has considered the reconfiguration of both socio-cultural and natural landscapes of hydrology and waterflow in Fascist Spain under Franco^x. This work articulates the process of scaling from the core of bureaucracy and politics into watery communities in ways which impact and effect those communities. The same processes of course can be used to mark or reconfigure other rural or peripheral spaces such as those considered by this paper in North Korea.

The paper is also absolutely concerned with the material of which the rural spaces and topographies of North Korea are made. Not only this material is of concern, but the role that material plays in the many political processes at work in North Korea. The paper in particular uses the enormously important work of Jane Bennett^{xi} and Sarah Whatmore^{xii} on the generation and existence of what they have termed 'vibrant' matter or political matter, a conceptual frame in which material itself an active participant and the processes by which that vibrancy and energy makes the material an agent within the network of political actors. This is true as much for rural vibrant matters as it is for urban energies so certainly useful in the North Korean cases of this paper. However Bennett and Whatmore's work on the specifics of non-human or non-sentient vibrancy must be read in tandem with the equally vital work of Jason Moore^{xiii}. Moore's interpretation of the 'web of life' holds that there can be no externalised Capitalism (or any other ism), acting upon Nature or natures for both are intrinsically within and around politics and political forms. Nature and natures run through economic, political, cultural and social imperatives, entwining, enmeshing, influencing and reordering them, and are inseparable from the many functions of human life. This must therefore be true of non-Capitalist politics and non-Capitalist Nature or nature. North Korea's politics, institutions, cultures, social frameworks and topography must necessarily as much an assemblage of Nature, natures and human endeavours and practice as any other manifestation of sovereignty. Capitalism is in Nature as much as Nature is Capitalism in Moore's reading, could be reconfigured for the North Korean case to read that Juché, Songun or Byungjin is in Nature and vice versa. This is also certainly true in rural terrain which is as marked and impacted by North Korean ideology as any other space in the country.

Moving from Moore's overarching reading of the wider 'web of life' to that of Bennett's addressing the function of specific elements of Nature or natures, allows a reading of North Korean terrain which is active and energetic. Bennett's seeks to deconstruct the boundaries of human privilege over notions of agency and action through considering animals, fish plants and other non-sentient actors such as bacteria, viruses, metals, and tectonic energy as actors in themselves, possessed of a form of politics.

Instead of a politics controlled or possessed at the level of the individual and the singular, these actors develop a distributed, inter and hyper personal politics which connects, contests and co-produces other forms of politics and agency^{xiv}. Notions of vibrant materiality and lively non-human actors can also connect to Kwon and Chung's conception of charismatic and theatric politics. Jamie Lorimer for instance has used Bennett's conceptions to theorise a politics of non-human charisma^{xv} (2007), which he uses primarily within the field of environmental and species conservation, but which underpins this author's examination of the role of topography within the stage of North Korea's politics. The reader should perhaps also consider the work of Thongchai Winichikaul, especially addressing Thai state development on notions of the eco-body, in which topographic features, and a sense of local natural sensibilities become entwined and enveloped by the processes of nation building and state formation^{xvi}. Notions of a North Korean 'eco-body' were particularly important following the end of the Japanese colonial period.

These conceptual and theoretical elements take the reader through the past and present of North Korea and the intersections between its politics, ideology and topography. This panel and paper is concerned a future North Korea, and in particular a future in which its current political frameworks and logics have transformed and disappeared. Given the huge importance Pyongyang places on its constructed and in part imagined histories and mythologies and the extraordinary way the landscapes of important places within them are marked by these narratives, such a change would have dramatic impacts on such places. Unification for instance with South Korea and the diminution or abandonment of North Korea's sense of history would render the vast majority of such commemorative or monumental places pointless and immaterial to new realities. The actual material of these architectures would of course remain, unless completely demolished and eradicated. It is the presumption of this author that a wholesale annihilation of the charismatic places of North Korean politics would be expensive, time consuming and institutionally complicated in a time period when the integration of the two countries would be extraordinarily challenging. For the most part therefore the author suggests the likely outcome for North Korea's political terrains and landscapes of ideological memory would be an extreme withdrawal of funding, the collapse of the bureaucratic structures designed to support and maintain them, the end of the yearly timetable of visits and pilgrimage and complete institutional disinterest and neglect. Perhaps within cities like Pyongyang, Wonsan and Chongjin it would be necessary for the larger of the physical places of memorial to be maintained structurally for public safeties sake, in the rural hinterland and wilder spaces of the north it would not be hard to envisage whole scale abandonment.

These places would thus quickly become ruined, abandoned places and this paper considers the frameworks used by scholars such as Tim Edensor^{xvii}, Thomas Lahusen^{xviii} and Caitlin DeSilvey^{xix} amongst many others to be entirely relevant. Landscapes marked by autocracy and specifically the logics of Socialism and Communism have of course been ruined and abandoned many times before in

living memory. Even places once vital to the functioning of government such as East Germany's Palace of the Republic in the middle of East Berlin were left to rack, ruin, abandonment and finally demolition (in that case in order to reconstruct architectures from the Prussian Imperial past)^{xx}. The many examples of war memorials built to honour the Soviet Union's perceived Liberation of eastern Europe are more of an example for this paper. Often built into the urban infrastructure of towns and cities, there are other examples of these memorials on the edge of towns and in the countryside for the most part which have been left to ruination in our present^{xxi}. In countries such as Estonia the development of new nationalisms and the policing of memory and new legal frameworks focused on legitimate and appropriate remembrance have banished such places almost beyond the pale, into graveyards on the edge of town in which no commemoration is possible or legal^{xxii}. Other ruins include the various architectures of control and security from the socialist era such as air and army bases, missile silos, bunkers and border watch towers. This author himself remembers childhood encounters with the complicated and technological infrastructures of the German internal border in the Harz mountains. Revisiting the area some 20 years later found these topographies to be scattered fragments of concrete, broken barbed wire and collapsed buildings deep in abandoned forest and scrubland. While much of Geography's ruin turn and 'ruinenlust' has focused on understanding and analysing the propensity of Capitalist politics to ruin and to make ruins of landscapes and communities, from post-industrial Detroit^{xxiii} to the plastic stuffed wastelands of some South Asian urban environments^{xxiv}, the ruins of Socialism have also gained substantial interest. So this paper takes DeSilvey and Edensor's reckoning with ruins^{xxv} and extends it with a degree of perceived resilience and endurance into the realm of the un-Capitalist. The forgotten spaces and perfunctory peripheralizing of Socialist memorial spaces^{xxvi} will be theoretically extremely useful for this paper. As much as possible disconnecting from any tendency to romanticise this paper in its consideration of the potential future for these North Korean spaces, explores imaginative possibilities in the ruination of the places it is most interested with, energies discharged and what might potentially remain for our imaginations and memory.

Birch Trees and Lake Samji

"Leaning on a birch tree on which spring tints were emerging, he posed with the commanding officers as well as with other guerrillas. One of them suggested to him that he should have a photo taken with Kim Jong Suk. Hearing this, Kim Jong Suk grew shy, and hid behind the backs of the women guerrillas. They pushed her forward to his side. In order not to miss the moment, the 'cameraman' clicked the shutter. For Kim Jong Suk, it was as good as a wedding photo."^{xxvii}

It is debatable of course whether this brief moment in the lives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk captured in euphemism the actual moment of their matrimony. The photo so often used recording the moment is itself in part at least a work of fiction, reminiscent of touched up and manipulated early Victorian photographs, almost artistic and painterly in appearance. There is certainly a birch tree

behind them in the photo, perhaps two and it is North Korea's repeated contention that a stand of birch trees by Lake Samji have survived since this moment in the early 1930s. These trees by the lake are now used for rituals and ceremonials on the anniversary not just of the day on which the photo was taken, whatever it actually represented, but also the birth and death anniversaries of Kim Jong Suk and moments in Kim Il Sung's life. These trees are no longer objects in the background of this now ancient photo, but in line with my own work on the use of topography in North Korean politics and Kwon and Chung's work on charismatic politics of that country, actors on the stage of that theatre. The trees serve as reliable and capable witness to that moment and to the powerful energies of authority, legitimacy and authenticity that underpin and sustain the political mythologies of North Korea. I have written on the processes and practices engaged by Pyongyang to scale and rescale political messages, authority, practice and power across time and space, from the grandest of North Korean governmental spaces to the most quiet and parochial of family places^{xxviii}. Lake Samji's birch trees are vital to the rescaling of the energy, power and reality of its first family's relationship. In a conventional political framework such the birch trees and their surroundings would be protected and conserved, beautiful arboreal elements within a landscape of natural beauty. This is certainly not what has happened in the case of North Korea. Lake Samji, its waters and the birch trees have become part of an extensive terrain of political memory which includes the 15 metre tall statue of Kim Il Sung dressed as a young man in his army fatigues, extensive drill squares, statues commemorating the various battles claimed to have occurred in the area, hotels and other facilities for visiting groups of young pioneers, bureaucrats and others on pilgrimage to the area. North Korea is also currently building new roads and refurbishing local railways to make the lakeside and the birch trees more accessible. Far from the remote wilderness in the far north of the Korean peninsula that Samjiyon surely was at the time of Kim Jong Suk and Kim Il Sung's struggles against the Japanese, the area is one of the key geographies of North Korea's political memory. It is deeply and almost intrinsically marked with the politics and ideologies of the nation, each year this marking becoming more dramatic^{xxix}.

How might we imagine the future for Lake Samji and its trees and the Samjiyon Grand Monument and its wide open concrete spaces loomed over by the enormous bronze figure of a young Kim Il Sung? At this moment North Korea's institutions are focused on future infrastructural developments to integrate the area into the wider networks of the nation. Its spaces and constituent materials currently are vibrant and active in the projection of the current politics of Pyongyang, the gleaming bronze representing the perceived functionality of North Korea's governmental offering, the newly laid standard gauge tracks of the Samjiyon Line, replacing the problematic old narrow gauge tracks attest to the interest being paid to the region by central institutions once again^{xxx}. Railway lines and infrastructure in this part of North Korea have long been problematic and plans to connect Ryanggang with the far northeast along the northern border taking pressure off the coastal lines have been

underway unsuccessfully for many decades. While there have since the Japanese colonial period been extensive industrial facilities amidst northern Korea's valleys and mountains, the connectivity of these places has always been problematic. It is not hard to imagine given the collapse or diminution of Pyongyang's central authority, problems arising with the future funding or support of these infrastructures. While the mines, factories and smelters of the north would surely survive changes in sovereignty on the peninsula, owing in part to the rarity of the mineral resources in this area, it cannot be clear whether Samjiyon continue to be important to future governments. Perhaps the birch trees of Lake Samji would continue to have a certain curiosity factor given their place in the life narratives of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Suk. It must be surmised that whatever institutional control succeeded the current Kim dynasty it would not be as concerned to maintain the material fabric of some of the more ephemeral or peripheral elements of these narratives. The trees therefore would perhaps not be as well maintained, their straight trunks and well cared for branches and crowns might degrade a little, but it is doubtful whether they would not be subject to arboreal husbandry enough to reach the normal life span for a birch tree, which is around 140 years (Samji's have at a minimum reached half of this already).

What would befall the concrete and copper of the Samjiyon Grand Monument is another case entirely. As has been seen across the landscapes of the former socialist nations of eastern Europe, following the transformation of ideological frameworks and the degradation of past institutional structures, the material life of the grand complexes of parade, drill and presentation is not long and certainly not subject to a great deal of resource. While elements of Samjiyon's memorial spaces can certainly make a claim on future memories and histories of a unified or different Korea, many more of course will not. It is not hard therefore to conceive of the drill and parade square falling into disuse and becoming derelict. It might be expected that the giant bronze statue of Kim Il Song will disappear or be vandalised, though its accompanying statuary of supportive guerrilla fighters might be more resilient and less subject to whatever punishments and humiliations the larger statues will be subject to. Much of the areas memorial architecture will given time, fade into disrepair, to be occasionally discovered or rediscovered by adventurous walkers half buried in shrubs and over growth. It may be that the tourist infrastructures such as the hotels, guest houses and eating facilities built recently survive for other purposes, primarily those of the next place this paper is interested in, but their original purpose could well be lost to time, the necessary memories of the intricacies of moments in North Korea's complicated historical narratives forgotten. Ultimately it may be that while the material of these very much political places is vibrant and lively now in the wider politics of North Korea, without this memory, without this history it is much less active and energetic. Its ruin will stand forgotten, testament to a ruined memory and a degraded and dispossessed history.

While Samjiyon and its monument have a future conceptualised by this paper in a fairly negative way, this is not true for all the places and spaces of this area. At first glance in the political and media

productions of North Korea the spaces around Mt Paektu which are focused on the memory of the guerrilla struggle of Kim Il Sung's band of communist partisans in the early to mid 1930s might be considered extremely problematic. After all much of the political and ideological energy on which North Korean politics has driven for many years and contradicting each other, scholars such as Kwon and Chung and their notion of charismatic politics^{xxxii} and BR Myers focused on North Korean ideology as an extension of Japanese ethno militarism and quasi blood fascism^{xxxiii} have claimed is the psychological and psycho-geographic root of its claim to authority and legitimacy, The mythologies of the Paektusan Generals are extremely deeply rooted in North Korean history and politics^{xxxiii}. This paper has already in a sense considered this with the focus on the birch trees of Lake Samji, but for the rest of the paper we will need to move closer to the mountain and then onto and into the mountain itself.

Paektu Secret Camp and Jong Il Peak

For current North Korean politics and commemorative practice arguably the most important physical landscape for its memory is the Paektu Secret Guerrilla Camp. While Pyongyang's historical narratives freely and frequently admit the camp underneath the mountain was at one time but one of a number of similar camps used by the small groups of anti-Japanese communist fighters in the 1930s, these alternative sites have for the most part become diminished in importance. While the slogan trees, some of the bivouacs and cooking areas used by Kim Jong Suk and her smaller band of female fighters are repeatedly used in North Korean media publications and writings and are used in a similar way to the trees at Lake Samji for political tourism, they are not conceptualised as being on the same level of significance as the Secret Guerrilla Camp. This small collection of log buildings which North Korea insists are the original buildings of the camp and the original location forms a dual pole with Mangyongdae (Kim Il Sung's birthplace and the home of his father and family outside of Pyongyang) of 'authentic' architectures of revolutionary importance prior to the Liberation of Korea in 1945. The Guerrilla Camp is also of course not simply renowned as the hide out of Kim Il Sung's band of fighters, but also as the birthplace of Kim Jong Il and therefore the place in which the Kim dynasty which still rules the nation was crystallised. The camp itself is certainly a substantial building and the grounds around it have been well trodden and extended perhaps to cope with the numbers of political and institutional tourists that must visit it through the course of each year. For South Korean politics the dynasty at the heart of North Korean governmentality is as problematic as the ideological direction taken by the country. However the space above the camp is similarly problematic and riven with complication for the future.

The Secret Guerrilla Camp is at the base of Mt Paektu, one of the most important mountains in Korean spiritual and cultural traditions, a conduit for sacred and powerful energy flows in following the concept of *Paektutaegan* across the peninsula^{xxxiv}. While its importance for Korean nationalism

and national sensibility may be considered a modern convention, its place as a spiritually significant landscape in Korean cultural traditions is not. Whether new or old the mountain is now sacred ground for all Koreans, its peak, scree, lake and caldera an important place to visit for citizens of both nations. On its slopes above the Secret Guerrilla Camp however is a rock outcrop whose terrain will surely need to be reconfigured in the years following any change to the institutional structures of the Korean nations. North Korea on that outcrop above the camp has seen fit to inscribe the signature of Kim Jong Il in huge letters and rename the topographic feature 'Jong Il Peak.' While it is possible that some of the legacies and memories of Kim Il Sung as a figure of nationalist resistance against the Japanese in the 1930s may survive radical changes to the status quo of politics and sovereignty on the peninsula, it is unclear whether Kim Jong Il could be disconnected from the narratives of threat and danger to South Korea's population, his seeming intense disregard for ordinary North Koreans and the economic catastrophe that befell the nation under his reign. It is the assumption of this paper therefore that it would be impossible for future Korean administrations to justify maintaining or repairing the inscribed signature on the mountain. It is also likely that future political authorities and institutions on the Korean peninsula would undertake a wide scale renaming exercise following changes to the political and government status quo. Similar exercises in renaming occurred in many eastern European states following political transformations in the 1990s with towns such as Karl Marx Stadt and streets being renamed to their original names (in that particular case, Chemnitz)^{xxxv}, and in the former Soviet Union following changes in political organisations after the death of Stalin and the dissolution of the union in the 1990 (Stalingrad's renaming as Volgograd for instance)^{xxxvi}. Local authorities and urban planners in other less politically tumultuous nations, such as the United Kingdom have also sought to rename streets and urban areas whose names mark difficult or contested histories (for example the renaming of streets which commemorated Imperial British victories in the Boer and Zulu Wars such as Mafeking). It is highly likely that Jong Il Peak would be renamed according to its previous historical nomenclature. It is also highly likely that although a difficult task, political institutions in a reconfigured Korea would seek to remove the signature from the mountain side.

As the paper has suggested while it is likely that a great deal of the historical and political memory and narrative of North Korea would be subject to deletion, removal and reconfiguration in a future Korean nation other examples of such moments demonstrate that while some enable the complete abandonment of previous narratives (such as in Estonia, the recovery of whose sovereignty has demanded the complete abandonment of models of history forged during the Soviet period, and Ukraine in which developments in national sensibility have required the generation of an entirely new historical narrative), some allow for uncomfortable historical dualisms to continue. Berlin for example, once capital of East Germany (DDR), now capital of a unified Germany still contains Rosa Luxemburg Platz, a square named after one of the most famous communist political agitators of the

first half of the twentieth century and Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russia Federation still has a town named Pionersky, named after the Soviet Union's Young Pioneers youth organisation. While it is perhaps not credible that a future Korean government would be prepared to support a budget large enough to support the current level of maintenance underneath Mt Paektu at the Secret Guerrilla Camp, it is possible that with a reconfiguration of historical narratives to avoid or downplay the element focusing on Kim Jong Il, the camp could still avoid ruination as a site connected to do the less problematic narratives of anti-Japanese resistance. The camp facilities could be considered as less problematic themselves as it is not surrounded by statuary and architecture overtly focused on the ideological memory of communism or socialism. It is not clear of course whether the architectures and spaces commemorating other elements of the narrative would be or could be maintained in any new political era for Korea. It is likely that the slogan trees, bivouacs, cooking areas and other spaces which underpin the thick web of history among the mountains slopes would be abandoned and left to ruin, unless they were close to access routes and walking trails leading to the summit.

Conclusion

This paper has considered the possibilities for specific currently political and ideological terrains in North Korea's rural and wilderness in the north of that country and abutting Mt Paektu. The ideology embedded within these spaces and architectures by the theatric and charismatic politics of North Korea has under Pyongyang's sovereignty made the material of these places, vibrant and lively. In the historical narratives written, constructed and at times imagined by North Korea the rocks, trees and soil of the mountain and its surrounding area have become important players and elements in the story, supportive of the struggles of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Suk and other anti-Japanese guerrillas and vital to their memory. During the period of North Korea's sovereignty many other materials have been implanted and built into the landscapes of the area and in conjunction with the natural elements of its topography these together have produced a terrain of memory and political power. From the perspective of those seeking to counter Pyongyang's political power these terrains have already been ruined, ruined by the socialist ideology of North Korea's autocratic political dynasty and system. These natural spaces have also surely been ruined by the construction of absurd monumental architectures designed to promote and develop elements of the personality cults surrounding Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, the bronze and concrete of statues and parade squares littering the landscape of the area. We might also consider the area, in common with many other places of politics and development in the era of Socialism and Capitalism on this earth to be permanently in a state of ruination due to human interaction. Geographers, Earth and Environmental Scientists call our current geological epoch the Anthropocene as humans are responsible for a ruination of the planet's environments, ecosystems, atmospheres and landscapes at a scale that will be recorded by geology itself. The impact of human politics and ideology will thus be traceable in the planet's rocks for aeons to come. While North Korea will certainly have contributed to this global ruination, the impact of its

politics on the spaces encountered by this paper is not as dramatic or on as large a scale. Lake Samji and the area to the south of Mt Paektu have indeed been impacted and transformed by North Korean politics, but their ruination is on a smaller scale.

In the future however, outside of the scale of geologic time and the Anthropocene, this paper posits the potential for their ruination according to different parameters. The paper suggests that it is highly likely in the event of changes to the political status quo on the Korean Peninsula, that elements of the complicated network of architectures in this area, in reality a highly rural and peripheral space in Korea, will be subject to abandonment, neglect and ruination of a type. While Lake Samji's birch trees, the wood of the Secret Guerrilla Camp and the terrain of Mt Paektu itself will very much as material objects and participants in history survive the collapse or replacement of North Korea's political ideology and sense of history, many other places in the ecosystem of memory surrounding them will not. For some of these the future holds the prospect of a passive neglect as the funding which supported their maintenance and the political imperatives which drove institutional, public and even private tourism to visit them disappears or is substantially reduced. The slogan trees, camp grounds and cooking areas on and around Mt Paektu which are important to memories of the guerrilla struggle will for the most part disappear into increased forest cover and unmaintained ground cover, eventually to become ruined, deconstructed and atomised. The concrete of the Samjiyon Grand Monument as well will crack, fragment and diffuse over time as it is no longer repaired or used for ceremony and ritual. These places will fall into ruin both literally and in the memory, their vibrancy and liveliness becoming dimmer and dimmer as their place within an abandoned history is forgotten. Other materials in the area such as the giant bronze statue of Kim Il Sung, the many statues of communist fighters and the enormous signature of Kim Jong Il on the side of the mountain will befall a very active form of ruination. The paper considers that it is very likely these will be deliberately destroyed following a moment of political and institutional reconfiguration. It is likely that many statues of Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il will suffer the same fate as Saddam Hussein's statue in Firdos Square, Baghdad on the 9th of April, 2003, unceremoniously torn down as symbolic of a previous era. Quite how the signature on Jong Il peak will be deconstructed is unclear, but the fate of Albania's slogan stones implanted throughout the nation on mountainsides under the role of Enver Hoxha might demonstrate that even large impacts on topography can be disappeared given time. Perhaps the destruction and dramatic ruination of such elements of the landscape will bring them to the forefront of public consciousness for a time, revivifying them in national memory, however it is clear that even given these circumstances their memory will fade. It is conceivably that at some point in the years to come no one will be able to point out the spot on which a young Kim Il Sung's bronze boots once touched the concrete at Samjiyon.

What is most likely to survive without ruination and long into the memory are those physical places which might be amenable or translatable into the political and historical realities of whatever Korean

institutions and powers follow a transformation of the status quo. The paper thus suggests that the most likely survivals in the area are likely to be the material of the Secret Guerrilla Camp, the birch trees of Lake Samji and the physical spaces on Mt Paektu which allow public access from the Korean side of the mountain. All of these places have been vital to the memory and vibrancy of North Korean politics and history, however all could be with some reconfiguration or repurposing become vibrant, lively materials in the memory, politics and history of a new Korean sovereignty. While it is likely that the area of the camp and the trees will be subject to some infrastructural diminution, they are unlikely to become ruined. Mt Paektu itself will for a long time to come be important to Korean national, cultural and spiritual sensibilities and so is extremely unlikely to become subject to ruination as we might understand it in the practical sense. As this paper has also touched on, the ecosystems of Mt Paektu and its surroundings are in this era of the Anthropocene (or Capitalocene, the name is subject to intense debate in the field of Geography), subject to a potential ruination on a much greater scale at the hands of climate change and environmental crisis. It may be ultimately this ruination that lives longer in the memory than the moments of ruin to which many North Korean political terrains will be subject to.

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