

TERROR CAPITALISM

Week 12 Leading Discussion

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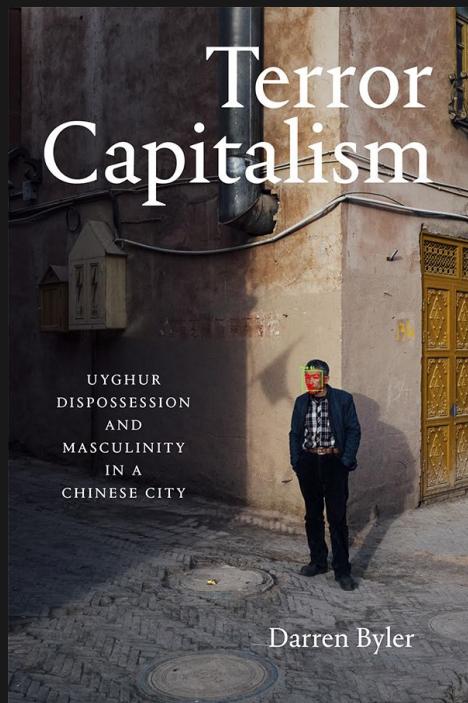
Author Background



Dr. Darren Blyer

- Assistant Professor of International Studies at Simon Fraser University
- Specialises in:
 - Anthropology
 - Forced Migration
 - Gender
 - Labour
 - Political Economy
 - Religion & Politics
 - Security Studies
 - Science, Technology, and Society Studies

Research Context



- Ethnographic research and fieldwork conducted in Urumchi, Uyghur region in Northwest China, between 2011 to 2018

1949

Native Uyghurs who practiced small-scale irrigated farming for livelihood

80% Uyghurs
6% Han

1950s

State moved millions of former (Han) soldiers to work as farmers to colonize pasturelands and territory

1990s

More Han settlers as public and private investments brought along new projects and infrastructures

2000s

Major demographic shift to become almost 50-50% Uyghurs & Hans

Key Terms

1

Settler
Colonialism

"Expropriative capital accumulation ... [through] **enclosure and dispossession** of land and institutions of ethno-racialized others" (p. 6)

2

Racialized
Capitalism

"Expropriative capital accumulation ... [through] **enslaved or dependent labor** of ethno-racialized others" (p. 6)

3

Terror
Capitalism

"[E]ver-expanding institutionalized global social system" (p. 5) that builds on **ethno-racialization, technological oppression, and colonial dispossession** in the bourgeois' accumulation of capital

THEMES



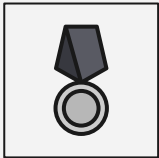
Theme #01

Racialized Capitalism and Settler Colonialism



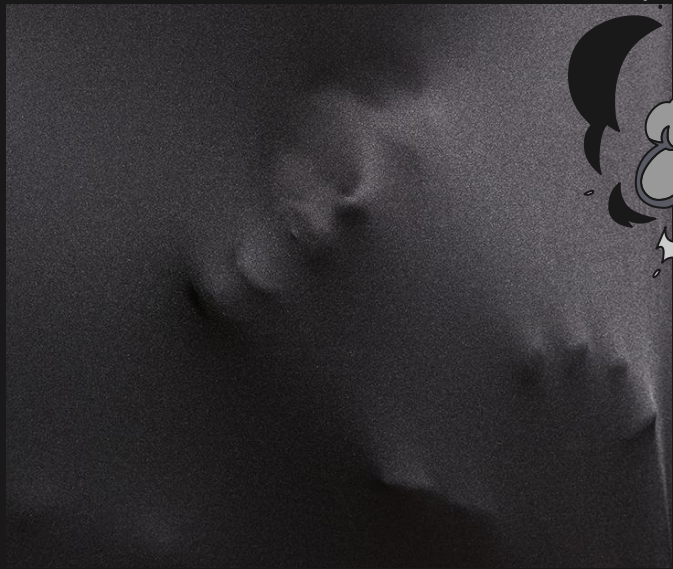
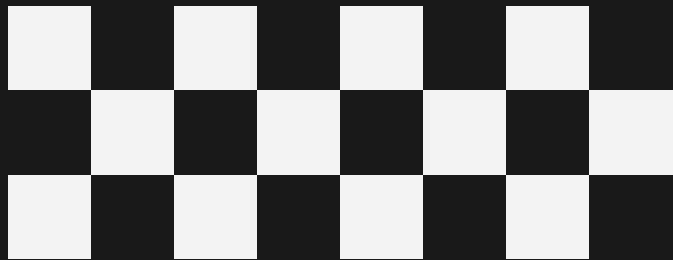
Theme #02

Digital Enclosures: Intensification of the Surveillance Industry



Theme #03

Subversion of Gendered Relationships and Experiences of Masculinity



01



Racialized capitalism and settler colonialism

How Uyghurs became proletarianized in Northwest China?

DEHUMANIZING

DISCOURSES



- **Demonization of Uyghur** population as **“backward”** and **“savage”** by state and its proxies (Byler, 2022, pp. 8-9)
- Prejudices against Uyghurs reinforced by **allegedly “Uyghur-led [acts] of political violence”** (Byler, 2022, p. 40)
 - Confirmation bias? (Cherry, 2022)
- **Close Interactions** between Uyghurs and fellow “Turkic Muslims” **viewed as “deviant [terrorist] behaviour”** (Byler, 2022, pp. 32-33)
- **Religious and Cultural Capital** of Uyghurs and other racial-ethnic minorities **inconsistent with Chinese government’s “pre-colonial civilizational purity” myth** (Byler, 2022, p.8)

RACIALIZED VIEW OF UYGHURS



- Uyghurs as **subjects of state-enforced arbitrary evaluative standards**
- Figure 1.1 in p. 13 reflect the Chinese **government's racialized view of Uyghurs**
 - Ideal citizens with manicured smiles and camaraderie
 - Symptoms of "disease" include **physically observable traits and religious and cultural symbols** (Byler, 2022, pp. 7,13,15)

Government agencies work with state proxies (i.e. state-supported private companies) to define the parameters of appropriate and deviant behaviour in a paternalistic manner (Byler, 2022, pp.12-3).

DISCOURSE OF SICKNESS



- Uyghurs **suspected of being a threat** to Han-dominated government **viewed as sick bodies containing "cancerous cells"** (Crossman, 2018)
 - "three interrelated [infectious] **ideological diseases**" include "separatism, extremism, and terrorism" (Byler, 2022, p.45)
 - "surgical " **treatment** through "**retraining and re-education**" but Uyghurs **lose their citizenship rights and liberties** (Alecci, 2022; Byler, 2022, pp.45-6)
- Degrading Uyghurs as "**ethno-racialized others**" (Byler, 2022, p.6-8,14)
 - **Incapable of internalizing "a reified form of Han cultural values"**
 - Not "disciplined enough" to be "exploited"
- Justify "Chinese colonization of Uyghurs" (Byler, 2022, p.10)

LUCRATIVE CHAOS FOR SETTLERS



Xinjiang as fertile site of settler colonialism due to **“expropriation” of abundant land, resources, and labor-power of Uyghurs** (Byler, 2022, pp.6-8,57-60)



Westward expansion of capital, technology and people from developed coastal provinces (e.g., Jiangsu) to Xinjiang (Byler, 2022, pp.13,57)

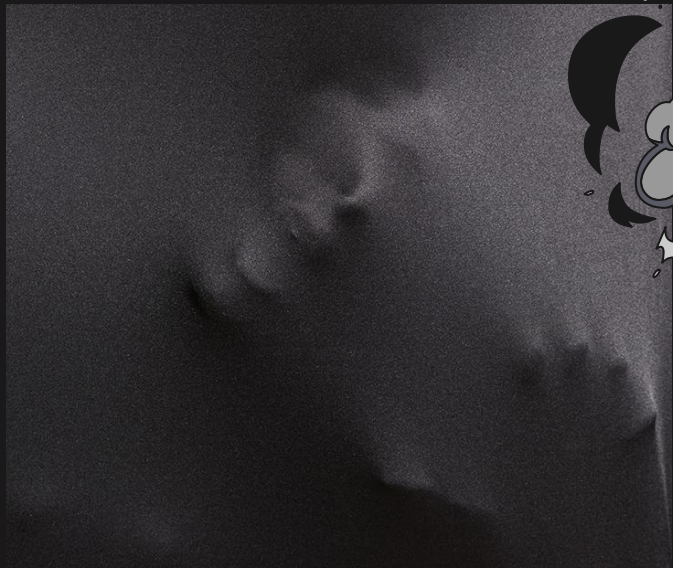
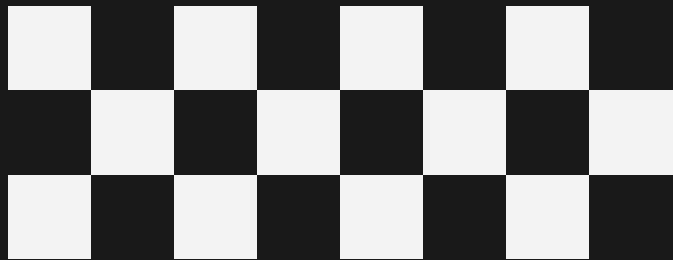


Increasing **limitations in “building further capacities [for economic production]”** and **“rising labor costs among Han migrant workers”** (Byler, 2022, pp.19,57)

PROLETARIANIZATION



- Uyghurs subordination under Han Chinese in “racial-ethnic hierarchy” (Byler, 2022, p.6)
- Lose avenues for self-employment (Byler, 2022,p.14)
 - Restrictions on “low-interest” loans and eviction by “Han landlords”
 - Reduced mobilities when “the state refuses to issue legal documents” for “travel and trade”
- Excluded from “high-skilled jobs in natural resource development” monopolised by the Han Chinese (Byler, 2022, p.14)
- Work in either “food service and waste management” sectors or within the “reeducation security system” (Byler,2022, pp. 14, 54-7)



02



Digital Enclosures

Intensification of the Surveillance Industry

Security Blurs: Constructing Digital Enclosures

Range of security performances constructed by “different sets of actors, roles, goals, motivations, values, objects, materialities, aesthetical appearances” that overlap, constantly re-configure dynamics of power, control, interpretations of security/threat

(state authorities, state police, police contractors, police ‘volunteers’, state-owned/private tech companies and technicians)



Terror Capitalism

- Rhetoric of terror(ism): need for “no blank spots” surveillance systems to locate “pre-criminal”, “untrustworthy” Uyghurs
- Rhetoric of national growth and expansion: need for large-scale state projects and private partnerships to develop infrastructure, industries etc.

Terror capitalism: constructing novel enclosures of surveillance, novel frontiers of capital accumulation and state power

“Xinjiang security industry mushroomed from a handful of private companies to over one thousand companies that utilized hundreds of thousands of workers ranging from low-level Uyghur security guards, to Han camera and telecommunications technicians, to coders and designers, to intelligence workers.” (Byler, 2022, p. 80)



Terror Capitalism

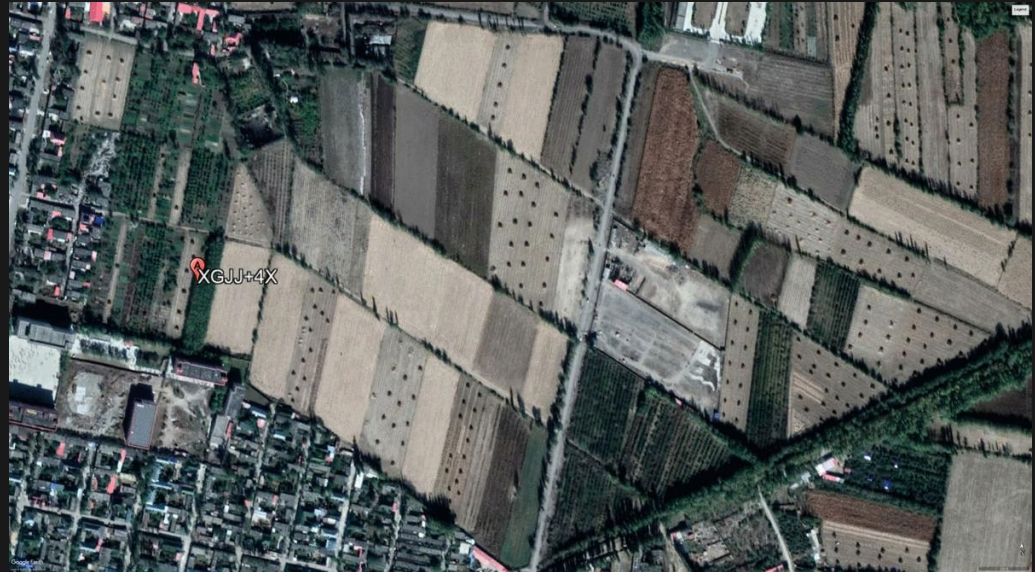
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Terror capitalism: constructing novel enclosures of surveillance, novel frontiers of capital accumulation and state power

\$160 billion in government entities to build detention-related infrastructure

\$65 billion in Private Public Partnerships (PPP)

\$7.2 billion specifically in the information security industry



Data Harvesting of Social Life

- State authorities' records of personal contacts and histories
 - (e.g., educational, financial, employment, biometric and medical, criminal, household and utilities records)
- Behavioural data from daily surveillance of movement
 - (e.g., facial structure/expressions and physiognomy, "dark" skin colour, unique fingerprints/voice and accent/iris shape/handwriting, hairstyles, dress, gait)
- Laws mandating tech and media companies to give user data
 - (i.e., total digital footprint of calls/text and voice messaging/email records, patterns of language use, search histories, purchases, social media traffic etc.)

Inter-agency sharing and processing of data by state police and police contractors to refine surveillance



Data granted to/received from tech and media companies to refine surveillance

Terror Capitalism



"... because of the state capital they were given and the mandate that came with it, firms in Xinjiang have *tremendous latitude to experiment with these technologies without fear of legal or civil resistance.*" (Byler, 2022, p. 77)

- Mutually profiteering arrangement for capital accumulation and state power
- State mandate emboldens terror capitalism, via counter-terrorism, cyber-security laws, lucrative state contracts
- Systematically enables Chinese tech companies to concentrate in Xinjiang and experiment on a surplus pool of (sub)human subjects



Data Janitors

- Police contractors (auxiliary police hired by local state police through private contracts), low-level technicians who are underpaid, underemployed
- Travel restrictions (their home counties have become their “open air” prisons) to lock them in place, yet their bodies are constantly moving, extracted as unfree labour

“Turkic Muslim young men, the most deeply vulnerable population in the reeducation project, are *coerced through economic and policing pressure into “freely” contracting with surveillance system employers who enact the general enclosure system over their own societies.*”

(Byler, 2022, p. 85)

“... the reeducation labour regime operates within a highly coercive system of surveillance and legal indeterminacy that prevents demands for equitable wages or autonomous work conditions.

Workers are always in a highly dependent position due to their detainability and the infrastructure that enforces it.” (Byler, 2021)

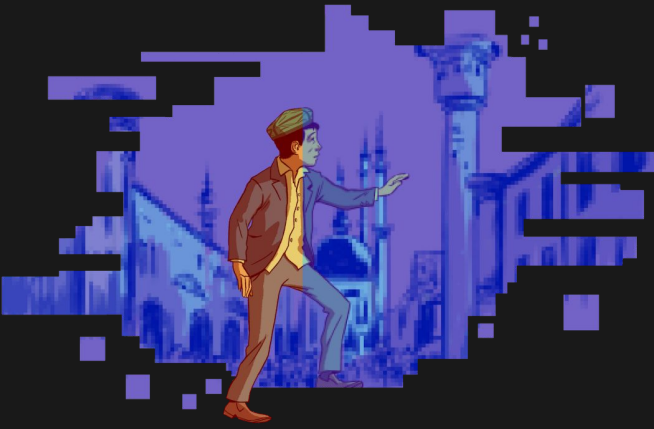


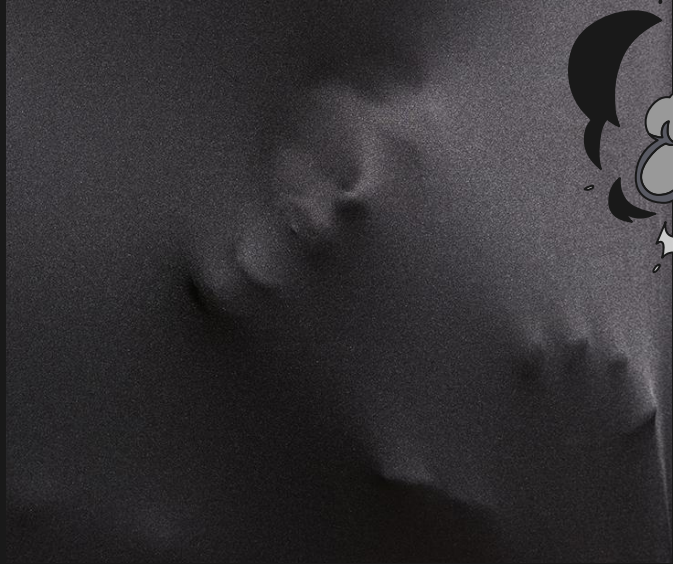
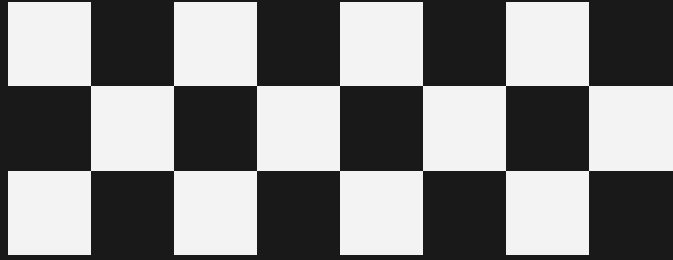
Data Janitors

- What are the experiences, emotions of performing security for these Uyghur men? Who/what are they 'protecting'?
- "Trustworthy", "Average", "Untrustworthy" social credit/social capital regime
- Agentic negotiation of security to sustain life, in the context of digital enclosures, devaluation, dispossession

"... taking the job was a choice he felt he could not refuse. Not only would he be able to *provide for his family* but he would also be able to *protect them from the re-education system*... Because of the ethno-racial devaluation of his social position, Baimurat felt he had *no choice but to work in service to the system of enclosure even as it foreclosed other life paths* for him."

(Byler, 2022, p. 85 & 95)





03



EXPERIENCES OF GENDER

Deconstruction, Reconstruction & Dispossession of Gender

DECONSTRUCTION: RE-EDUCATION MEDIATING THE EXPERIENCE OF GENDER

STATE AGENDA

- Uyghur masculinities as a perceived threat to territorial sovereignty
- System of re-education designed to erase their cultural and religious identity
- Attempt to re-educate Uyghur men to save their wives from Islam and Uyghur gender relations

EXAMPLE

As an act of liberation from Uyghur Islamic Patriarchy

- Remove children from homes
- Force wives and mothers to remove veils



Uyghur child kisses an image of her father six months after he was taken to a reeducation camp for praying at a local mosque

DISPOSSESSION: FALSE FORM OF FEMINISM

“Uyghur women became an abstract object to be saved”

- In celebration of International Women’s Day (2018), Uyghur men were asked to wash the feet of their wives
 - As a sign of ‘gender equality’
 - A way of demonstrating submission to the state’s definition of feminist gender relationships in their domestic life

Explicit attempt by state authorities to violate Uyghur practices of Islamic purity under the guise of gender equality



Perceived as an emasculating act by Uyghur men who felt that their male authority is compromised; an attack on male agency as protectors of Uyghur identity

DISPOSSESSION: RETALIATION THROUGH INTIMATE POLICING

Emasculation of Uyghur men

- As a result of the assault on their masculinity, Uyghur men often felt it was their duty to protect Uyghur women and children from the violence of enclosure and devaluation
- Counterproductive: in this process Uyghur women are further dispossessed when their agency is not recognize

Intimate Policing

- Hypervigilance on issues of modesty: Lash out at women who violated Uyghur gender norms
- Admonishment was appropriate between husband and wife or father and daughter



Negotiation of positionalities:

1. Being subjected to re-education camps and emasculation
2. Attempt to reassert masculinity by reinforcing hegemonic masculinities and patriarchal power dynamics on Uyghur women

RECONSTRUCTION: HOMOSOCIALITY

Byler developed close friendships with Uyghur men

- Focused attention on everyday forms of care that provided the grounding of terror capitalism and resisted it
- Considers how young Uyghur men construct and embody their masculinity through their social relations and sensory performance

Dispossession: As urban migrants, Uyghur young men were isolated from their rural families and forced to delay marriage; they were compelled to rely on each other for support

Homosociality as politics of resistance

- Uyghur men cared for each other despite underemployment and racialized policing
- Drawing on Uyghur *yerlik* traditions, they turned to each other to share their grief, pain and develop palliative forms of protection
- Art making; storytelling; performing their selves gave migrants a way of making sense of their situation as persons

THE UYGHUR EXPERIENCE OF GENDER

DECONSTRUCTION

State Rhetoric

Re-education designed to erase their cultural and religious identity

Mediating the experience of gender → Reducing Uyghur identity for state reinterpretation

DISPOSSESSION

Uyghur women whose agency is unrecognized

As a result of male assertion of hegemonic masculinity and patriarchal power dynamics

RECONSTRUCTION

Homosociality

Story telling; art making; sharing of grief and pain

Everyday forms of resistance

Uyghur men have multiple narratives and subjectivities; an uyghur man is a husband or father, he is also a young urban migrant; and they have different stories, experiences and ways of negotiating their positionalities

CONCLUSION

**Racialized Capitalism
and Settler Colonialism**

**Digital Enclosures:
Intensification of the
Surveillance Industry**

**Deconstruction,
Reconstruction &
Dispossession of Gender**

- Various forms of inequalities intersect (gender, ethno-racial, class)
- Modern-day capitalist system is built on exploitations of other newly-commodified aspects of life (gender, data, cultural beliefs, racial identity)

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think there are digital enclosures in Singapore? In what domains of social life are they present? What are the discourses that various state and non-state actors employ to justify the use and regulation of these enclosures?
2. How does the Singapore government construct multi-national (tech) corporations, especially social media companies? What are underlying state agendas/political motivations behind bills like POFMA, FICA (stating the threat of 'foreign interference' in 'domestic politics' and security)? ([Singapore: Social media companies forced to cooperate with abusive fake news law - Amnesty International](#); [Facebook says 'deeply concerned' about Singapore's order to block page | Reuters](#))
3. Are there elements of racialized capitalism in all policing and carceral systems around the world? Can you think of examples or case studies?
4. How did Darren Byler practice objectivity and ethics as an ethnographer who conducted research in Xinjiang? What are some risks and dangers of conducting a research on Uyghur population in Xinjiang?

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MANY THANKS!



Do you have any questions?

P.S. Extra Resource for those who are interested to find out more about the security crackdown of Uyghers in Xinjiang: [Inside Xinjiang](#) by The Telegraph (a three part video series)

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