

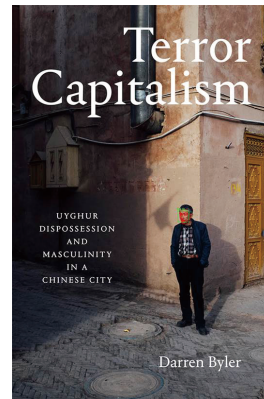
Chinese Communist Party” (p. 312), that is to say truth and memory. Punks undertake to deconstruct the figureheads of Communism, acknowledging the crimes of the Chinese authorities and putting forward an alternative pantheon to the official history, using their art as a “place for uncovering hidden memories” (p. 328). As such, the repression of 4 June 1989 represents a structuring element of Chinese punk that includes the keeping alive of memory through words, illustrations, and coded messages to the public.

Scream for Life offers us an insight into one of the least-known musical universes in China, yet one of the most fascinating, whilst at the same time enriching a literature on Chinese popular music that has not yet been sufficiently developed. If punk has been saddled with numerous clichés since its appearance in Great Britain, Nathaniel Amar, like Dick Hebdige (1979) several decades ago, has successfully met the challenge of revealing the political and artistic meanings conveyed by this counterculture in the context of contemporary China. The retranscription of long ethnographic notes and the use of a large body of (translated) song lyrics give this work a fluidity that makes it of interest to both academics and music lovers.

Translated by Elizabeth Guill.

References

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Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City.

Durham: Duke University Press.

I ANDREW B. KIPNIS

is Professor of anthropology, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shatin, N.T., Hong Kong (abkipnis@cuhk.edu.hk).

Darren Byler has written a moving, powerful, and timely book, though the titular framing of “terror capitalism” obfuscates more than it illuminates. Byler conducted his research in the city of Ürümqi, capital of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China, between 2011 and 2018. He set out to do research on rural-urban migrants there, including migrants of Uyghur, Han (mainstream Chinese), and other ethnicities, but as the Muslim men he met were increasingly surveilled, dispossessed, and disappeared, he shifted his focus from migration to dispossession. These two themes interrelate, as dispossession in rural areas often leads to migration to the city, where further forms of dispossession can occur.

There is a hopeful aspect to the earlier parts of his research, which Byler presents under themes such as friendship, anticolonial politics, and cosmopolitan Islamic religious flourishing. Despite Islamophobia, anti-Uyghur racism, and increasing surveillance, until roughly 2016, migrant Uyghur men were able to survive in the city, living in Uyghur spaces, caring for their friends, and sharing forms of religious piety and hope on Chinese social media and in neighbourhood mosques. As Chinese president Xi Jinping began his “people’s war on terror” in 2015, the spaces for Uyghurs to live in the city contracted, surveillance intensified, and the Uyghur men Byler knew were forced to return to their rural homes, where they were rounded up and sent to detention camps.

Because of these policies, but also reflecting a dynamic seen in many places in the world, social media for Uyghurs in Xinjiang transform from a source of hope to a means of oppression. At first, even the Chinese social media platform WeChat opened up a space for migrant workers to form friendships, and to share and learn from religious memes, art, poetry, and other content. But after a few years, this space of sharing becomes a tool of surveillance, in which every contact and act of religious sharing – not to mention location data – serves as a pretext for labelling migrants religious extremists or terrorists.

Byler learned both Uyghur and Mandarin, and uses his linguistic competence well when exploring the subtleties of terms from both

languages and the tensions between them. He devotes considerable attention to the terms *musapir* in Uyghur and 盲流 (*mangliu*) in Mandarin. Both can refer to a type of migrant who does not have a clear or permanent home or destination, but *musapir* also has religious connotations of seeking God or truth. Byler derives the title of the final chapter, “Subtraction,” from the Uyghur term *kiyetti*. Uyghurs now use the term to refer to the act of removing someone from Uyghur social life to a non-Uyghur context such as a prison camp or forced factory labour. Such people have been “subtracted.”

The problems of the book’s framing of this dispossession as “terror capitalism” stem from the singularity of the way in which the book conceptualises “capitalism” and the hopelessness such a singular conception generates. After defining capitalism as “an ever-expanding institutionalized global social system” (p. 5), Byler cites Robin Kelley to argue that “Race and gender are not incidental or accidental features of the global capitalist order (...) Racism is fundamental for the production and reproduction of capitalism” (p. 21-2). Such a statement clearly frames capitalism as a singular entity. Byler continues by arguing: “The key to the survival of capitalist systems is social reproduction, the care work necessary to support monetarily valued forms of production” (p. 22). Byler wishes to affirm antiracist and feminist analyses and extend these analyses to Uyghur migrant men’s care for each other. He clearly takes a positive stance towards these men’s efforts. But the logic of the juxtaposition of these two arguments results in a depressing conclusion: care work enables the reproduction of capitalism, capitalism requires racialised dispossession and racism, and thus the care Uyghur friends provide for one another – or that (usually) women provide in their families – can only lead to further racialisation, dispossession, and subtraction.

Second, this book overlooks continuities between dispossession in the supposedly “anticapitalist” regime of Mao and the capitalist dispossession of today. While mentioning the Maoist creation of Han collective farms in Xinjiang, Byler suggests that such farms took only land that Uyghurs were not using, yet leaves unexamined how they drew water resources away from Uyghur land. When discussing life on the noncapitalist agricultural collectives from which rural Uyghur men migrate, he interrogates how men leave the farms because of capitalist dispossession in the twenty-first century. Unfortunately, the book fails to mention the violence of collectivisation itself and the Great Leap Famine. Despite discussing the Red Guard status of one man at length, the study does not consider the possible history of anti-Uyghur Cultural Revolution violence. Widespread antiminority violence has been extensively documented in Tibet and Inner Mongolia for that period. If capitalism requires racialised dispossession, a close analysis of Maoism might suggest that historical instances of socialism likewise had such a need.

Finally, the book falls short of analysing how the Chinese state ideology that justifies Uyghur dispossession draws from Marxian anticapitalist theory. The dismissal of “human rights” and “rule of law” as forms of liberal, capitalist, bourgeois rhetoric, the ease of dispossession in a country where property rights depend upon the largess of the state, and the requirement of a Leninist authoritarian ruling party, all derive from rhetoric that presents capitalism as a flawed global social system that can only be overturned by a revolutionary party devoted to upending that unitary system.

Byler fears that analysing the situation in Xinjiang “as a

manifestation of tyrannical state communism” (xiii) prevents comparison to the many other oppressive situations in today’s world, but the book offers many frames for comparison besides capitalism. State tyranny does not exist only in countries run by communist parties; neither does settler colonialism nor new technologies of surveillance, nor the outsourcing of police-work, surveillance, repression, and war to private contractors. Comparing the outsourcing of repression and war could more convincingly be done with a title such as “terror for profit” than “terror capitalism.” For those who have trouble understanding the difference between the terms, consider that the United States relied more heavily on private military contractors in Iraq than in Vietnam. But few anthropologists who use the term capitalism would say that the United States during the period of the Vietnam war was not capitalist. The change in policy was not a matter of changing from noncapitalism to capitalism, but something more subtle. Moreover, there are ways of “profiting” in social formations that no one would consider “capitalist.” “Terror for profit” avoids the singularised connotations of the word capitalism, while pointing at dynamics that may occur in many societies when the logics of making money and waging war combine.