

UNEVEN STATE TERRITORIALIZATION: GOVERNANCE, INEQUALITY, AND
SURVIVANCE IN XINJIANG, CHINA

by

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ABSTRACT

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Uneven State Territorialization: Governance, Inequality, and Survivance in Xinjiang, China

Thesis directed by Professor John O'Loughlin

Authoritarian state power is often repressive and uneven, as well as ideological and material. The strikingly visible aspects of Chinese state power in Xinjiang overlook the invisible and nefarious aspects of the everyday violence of the nation-state working at the level of the neighborhood and everyday life. I use long-term ethnographic fieldwork to study some of the more invisible aspects of state power at the scale of the body, home, market, and neighborhood in everyday life. In drawing on observations of tight state control, I answer the questions: How does the state control territory, and how do people respond? What is the role of bureaucracy, policing, surveillance, displacement, and development in securing state territorial control? How do people experience and navigate state dispossession in the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres? In exploring these questions, I provide examples from Xinjiang to show how state building occurs in China and the results of state power on everyday life for ethnic minority and majority groups living in this autonomous region.

While the Chinese state maintains a significant presence in people's lives in Xinjiang, I also emphasize the gaps in space and time of that presence. Specifically, I look at the effects of state power, especially how the multiplicity and complexity of state power is experienced when it comes to people's daily tasks. I trace the effects of neighborhood governance and uneven development on everyday life in urban Xinjiang. I examine how individuals create social space in heavily regulated and securitized state space. State control permeates people's lives in disruptive

ways. Meanwhile, Uyghur cultural performances at the scales of the body and household reflect affiliation with the Muslim world that disrupt the national Chinese imaginary and the false assumption of territorial control as a static container.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to everyone in Xinjiang who gave me their hearts, their lives, their stories, their patience, their time, and their hospitality. Without them and their vulnerability, this dissertation would never have been possible. I cannot thank them or lots of other people by name here, but I dedicate this dissertation to them: To M and S for their continued and sustained friendship through countless delicious meals of kawap, lamp soup, and pumpkin dumplings; To N for her deep vulnerability—I miss you terribly and think of you daily; To AN and HG for their laughter, BZ for her smiles and hugs, SH for being my best student, and TG for the spicy food and giggles. This is also dedicated to R for her cute smiles, and A for intellectual and philosophical challenges. I also dedicate this to M and P for their unending friendship until the very end and unceasing invitations to hang out on the weekends, as well as G and M’s companionship as roommates and putting up with my confusing and frustrating American living habits.

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Chapter 2 is part of a co-authored paper with Caitlin Ryan for publication in *Geographical Review*. All words included in the dissertation are my own, but Caitlin's comments on earlier drafts helped improve the language.

Chapter 4 was first presented at the 2016 International Uyghur Conference in Moscow and benefitted from conversations with Dilnur Reyhan, Elise Anderson, Rian Thum, James Leibold, Joanne Smith Finely, Sean Roberts, Adrienne Dwyer, and Sandrine Catris there. I presented the chapter again at the 2017 Social Science History Association conference in Montreal chaired by

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: UNEVEN STATE TERRITORIALIZATION.....	p. 2
I. Summary of Findings and Main Arguments: Suffocating and Breathing.....	p. 5
II. Historical Context.....	p. 13
A. History of the Political, Economic, and Cultural Integration of Xinjiang into China during the Qing Dynasty.....	p. 13
B. Background Information on <i>Minzu</i> and Ethnicity: United among Difference.....	p. 18
C. Transitioning from Empire to Nation-State: Republican Era (1912-1949) State Conceptions of Peripheral Minorities.....	p. 20
D. Mao Era (1949-1978) of CCP Conceptions of the Peripheral Minorities: Social Science and Modernization Projects.....	p. 21
E. Post-Reform China from 1979 to Present: The Open Up the West Campaign in Xinjiang.....	p. 24
F. Uyghur Identity in the PRC.....	p. 25
III. Demographic Context of Xinjiang.....	p. 27
A. Demographics.....	p. 28
B. Place Names.....	p. 33
IV. Social Context of Xinjiang and the Field Site.....	p. 35
A. Thick Description of Ürümchi and Tengritagh District as Field Site: 2014- 2016.....	p. 35
B. Thick Description of My Neighborhood in Tengritagh District: 2014-2016..	p. 38
C. Thick Description of My Neighborhood in Tengritagh District: 2017.....	p. 44
D. Conclusion.....	p. 48

CHAPTER 2

METHODS: POSITIONALITY, SURVEILLANCE, AND INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY.....	p. 51
I. Positionality of an American Researcher in the Field.....	p. 51
A. How and Why I Obtained Initial Interest in the Field Site.....	p. 51
B. How I Chose the Research Topic.....	p. 53
C. How I Obtained Permission.....	p. 54
D. How I Initially Approached Ürümchi as Field Site.....	p. 57
E. How I Experienced the Fieldwork.....	p. 61
II. Surveillance: Political Sensitivity, Digital Monitoring, and Precarious Research Conditions.....	p. 63
A. Confusion, Fear, and the Power of Digital State Surveillance.....	p. 64
B. Ethical Research Practices.....	p. 71
III. Interview and Field Note Taking Methodology.....	p. 73
A. Learning Uyghur.....	p. 73
B. Methodological Details for Participant Observation.....	p. 75
C. Methodological Details for Interviewees with Uyghur Participants.....	p. 79
D. Methodological Details for Interviews with Han Participants.....	p. 83
E. Conclusion.....	p. 88
 CHAPTER 3	
THEORY: ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE STATE, FEMINIST GEOPOLITICS, AND SETTLER COLONIALISM.....	p. 92
I. Theory.....	p. 92
A. The State Effect: Uneven and Fractured State Power.....	p. 92
B. Fragmented Authoritarianism.....	p. 96

C. Ethnography of State Power.....	p. 97
D. Ethnography of Bureaucracy.....	p. 99
E. Ignoring the State through Escapism in the Body: Feminist Geopolitics.....	p. 102
F. Post-Structural Approaches to the Body.....	p. 104
G. Settler Colonialism and Refusal.....	p. 108
H. Dispossession.....	p. 113

CHAPTER 4

SERVICE, SAFETY, AND FEAR IN THE <i>SHEQU</i> : BUREAUCRACY, POLICING, AND MISTRUST IN XINJIANG, CHINA.....	p. 119
I. Theory and Background.....	p. 126
A. Bureaucracy and Policing: Visible and Invisible Forms of State Power.....	p. 126
B. The History of the <i>Shequ</i> in China.....	p. 127
II. Territorial Control through Bureaucratic Community Centers: Service, Confusion, and Mistrust.....	p. 131
A. Background Information on Community Centers: <i>Shequ</i> in Ürümchi, Xinjiang.....	p. 132
B. For Your Safety, At Your Service: Textual Analysis of <i>Shequ</i> Documents and Government Propaganda.....	p. 139
C. Perspectives on the <i>Shequ</i> : Irrational and Arbitrary Social Regulation: <i>Awarichilik</i> , <i>Munasiwet</i> and <i>Heqiqe Yoq</i>	p. 151
D. Wider Political Crackdown of 2017: <i>Shequ</i> and Policing.....	p. 161
E. Evictions and Incarceration.....	p. 168
F. Mistrust: “They Say, ‘Go Ahead and Have that Stuff’”.....	p. 172
III. Conclusion and Discussion.....	p. 175

CHAPTER 5

IGNORING THE STATE AS REFUSAL AND SURVIVANCE: THE BODY AS

TERRITORY.....	p. 180
I. The Body as Territory.....	p. 183
II. Spaces of Escape as Survivance for the Wealthy.....	p. 185
A. Home as a Physical Space of Escape: Fearful Hiding and Futile Inspections.....	p. 185
B. Consuming Leisure as Escapism: Coffee shops and Dance Clubs as Physical and Psychological Spaces of Escape.....	p. 191
C. Learning English and Dreaming to Go Abroad: Psychological Bubbles of Escape.....	p. 199
III. Spaces of Ignoring as Survivance for the Poor.....	p. 204
A. Markets: Evading the Police in Desperation.....	p. 205
B. Ethno-Religious Practice.....	p. 216
C. Religion and Clothing.....	p. 220
IV. Conclusion.....	p. 224

CHAPTER 6

“WE CAME WITH HIGH HOPES FOR A NEW LIFE”: DISPOSSESSION, DEVELOPMENT, AND DISPLACEMENT.....	p. 227
I. Displacement from the Countryside.....	p. 230
A. Moving to the City for Political and Cultural Freedom.....	p. 230
B. Jobs and Educational Opportunities: “I had to move to the city because there are no jobs in my hometown”	p. 235
II. Relocation to the City.....	p. 238
A. Stuck between a Rock and a Hard Place: “I don’t like the city, but <i>amal yoq</i> . I can’t go back to my hometown”	p. 238
B. Economic Pressure: “Security has had a negative effect on our business, it’s hard to make money (<i>pul tepish tes</i>) in the city”	p. 241
C. Increasing Resentment: “They are taking away our culture, our religion, and our	

language”	p. 242
III. Eviction from the City: Removal and Incarceration.....	p. 244
IV. Wealthy Uyghurs’ Story: Homeownership and Displacement.....	p. 254
V. Conclusion.....	p. 257
 CHAPTER 7	
HAN CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON XINJIANG: HOPE, OPPORTUNITY, AND	
INEQUALITY.....	p. 261
I. Literature Review and Theory.....	p. 263
A. Historical Background.....	p. 263
B. Legitimacy.....	p. 266
II. Social Context of the Han in Xinjiang.....	p. 268
A. Setting the Scene: Northern Ürümchi, in a Han-majority district.....	p. 268
B. Social Context of the Han in Xinjiang.....	p. 272
III. Development.....	p. 278
A. Linear Narratives of Progress and Settler Colonialism: “Xinjiang is a place with opportunities to make money”	p. 278
B. Theme 1: “Ürümchi is better than the cities in neidi because there are more job opportunities with comparatively higher salaries and cheaper housing”	p. 280
C. Theme 2: “Ürümchi is better than the countryside because here there are more job opportunities, but I miss my family and make just barely enough money to eat”	p. 285
IV. Opinions about Policing.....	p. 291
A. Theme 3: “Business is poor and the government’s annoying regulations are not helping. People want to leave and a lot of people are leaving, which only just makes business worse”	p. 292
B. Theme 4: “In general, I don’t come in contact with the <i>shequ</i> , but when I do, I am satisfied with their work and I feel safer now”	p. 296

V. Conclusion.....	p. 298
CONCLUSION.....	p. 299
EPILOGUE.....	p. 307
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	p. 312
APPENDIX	
A. Interview Questions in English.....	p. 324
B. Images from <i>shequ</i> registration and propaganda documents.....	p. 326

TABLES

Table

2.1	Purpose and Data Collected from Participant Observation.....	p. 77
2.2	Demographics of Uyghur Interviewees, n=46.....	p. 81
2.3	Total Number of Uyghur Research Participants by Type, n=98.....	p. 83
2.4	Demographics of Han Interviewees, n=45.....	p. 85
2.5	Total Number of Han Research Participants by Type, n=66.....	p. 88
4.1	Uyghur Interviewee Demographic Information.....	p. 134
4.2	Interview Results for Questions about the <i>Shequ</i> for Uyghur Research Participants.....	p. 135
4.3	Han Interviewee Demographic Information.....	p. 136
4.4	Interview Results for Questions about the <i>Shequ</i> for Han Research Participants.....	p.137

FIGURES

Figure

1.1	Map of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.....	p. 3
1.2	Photo of a sign on the gates that surround the local park on how to “sweep away” porn, gambling, and illegal publications.....	p. 7
1.3	Photo of some of the many gates that surround city parks and sidewalks.....	p. 10
1.4	Map of the Tarim Basin and Taklamakan Desert.....	p. 13
1.5	Photo of a propaganda poster on a banister in Ürümchi.....	p. 19
1.6	Political map of Xinjiang.....	p. 28
1.7	Maps of the demographic and wealth distribution in the XUAR.....	p. 30
1.8	Map of Ürümchi.....	p. 32
1.9	Map of the largest Tarim oasis states in the 1st Century BCE.....	p. 34
1.10	Map of Tengritagh District in Ürümchi.....	p. 39
1.11	Photo of a propaganda poster.....	p. 45
1.12	Photo of propaganda on a wall.....	p. 47
2.1	A poster titled “Procedures to Clean Up WeChat”.....	p. 66
4.1	Photo of a typical sign outside of one branch of a <i>shequ</i>	p. 122
4.2	Fruit and vegetable market subsidized by the <i>shequ</i>	p. 123
4.3	Photo of an example of demonizing rhetoric.....	p. 142
4.4	Photo of a collage of pictures of people from different <i>minzu</i>	p. 149
4.5	Photo of <i>shequ</i> propaganda on a wall.....	p. 150
4.6	Photo of the Erdaoqiao Grand Bazaar market with police station.....	p. 162
4.7	Photo of a police station.....	p. 164
5.1	Photo of a curtain market in Ürümchi.....	p. 207

5.2	Photo of an empty curtain market in Ürümchi.....	p. 208
5.3	Photo of demolition.....	p. 211
5.4	Photo of a red banner over a soon-to-be demolished Uyghur medicine shop.....	p. 212
6.1	Photo of a typical Uyghur living room.....	p. 232
6.2	Photo of notification of demolition by the <i>shequ</i>	p. 251
6.3	Photo of the “chai” symbol of demolition.....	p. 252
7.1	Photo of the skyline of downtown Ürümchi.....	p. 269
7.2	Photo of the billboards in downtown Ürümchi.....	p. 270
7.3	Photo of one of the main intersections in downtown Ürümchi.....	p. 271

PRELUDE

Kawap: Uyghur word for kabob

Kawapchi: One who roasts kabobs

March 2017: Tonight on my cold and rainy walk home, I stopped at my favorite *kawap* stand, which sits in a storefront no larger than one square meter. The *kawapchi* smiled at me in recognition.

“I’ll have three egg-coated chicken *kawap*, please!” I said, hardly able to contain my excitement as my stomach rumbled. “For here, with cumin!” I added.

He carefully used an iron pincher to pick up and place three raw chicken *kawap* onto the sides of the rounded, clay pit oven called a *tonur*. The oven glowed red with the heat of the coal burning inside.

The smoky scent of roasting meat filled my nose. A single light bulb hung from the ceiling, illuminating the tiny square of sidewalk where four other patrons and I huddled under the awning trying to escape as best we could from the rain. One was a little girl about five-years-old wearing her tracksuit school uniform, red Communist scarf, and Disney’s Frozen backpack. We all waited silently with our hoods up, rubbing our hands and bouncing our legs in the cold. My nose was running, and every time I sniffed I got a big dose of *kawap* grill smoke down my throat.

The two *kawapchi* working were smiling with droopy eyelids as though they were high on hashish. The whole time, they made jokes and teased each other, referring to each other as *sen*, which is a very intimate second person address. They worked together, one putting the *kawap* in the *tonur* oven, then the other taking the iron rods out and squeezing the meat with naan to pull it off the rods, sprinkling cumin or spicy pepper on them, and wrapping them up in plastic bags for “to go” orders.

As they worked, I made small talk with them. The usual stuff. The *kawapchi* replied to my series of questions: “I’m from Kashgar. I’ve been here a year. I’m 19 years old. No, I don’t like it here, but it’s more free than my hometown. I have four brothers and sisters.” They smiled in amusement at my accent.

When the *kawap* were finally done, I leaned over the cardboard box that was set out for trash, chewing the meat off the bones and spitting the bones out into the trash box. The others next to me did the same. We stood there together wordlessly huddled around the box and enjoying the juicy meat, the salty flavor of the cumin, and the crunchy coating of egg over it. Some others opted for liver *kawap* instead, and one had a trickle of blood running down the side of his mouth when he bit into it. After I finished, with my stomach full, I handed them six *koy*¹ (89 cents in USD) and thanked them. They smiled and I was on my way.

¹ Kuai is the colloquial term for “yuan,” or Chinese currency. It is pronounced “koy” in Uyghur. Sometimes Uyghurs use the word “*som*” instead, the same word used in other Turkic-based Central Asian languages.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: UNEVEN STATE TERRITORIALIZATION

“Uneven development is social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape, and it is simultaneously the exploitation of that geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends” (Smith 2008 [1984], 206).

I explore geographical manifestations of unevenness in the political, economic, and social spheres of everyday life in Ürümchi (see Figure 1.1). From uneven state control to socioeconomic inequality, “geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends” exemplifies life in Ürümchi (Smith 2008 [1984], 206). For example, Han and Uyghur neighborhoods are governed differently: Uyghur neighborhoods are under tighter surveillance and police control than Han neighborhoods. State territorial control is both tight and relaxed in different spaces and times. Rich and poor Uyghurs have different experiences of the state (see Chapter 4, 5 and 6). When compared with rich and poor Han (see Chapter 7), people have different experiences based on significant socioeconomic cleavages in cultural and material landscapes. The opening vignette in the prelude exemplifies some of the prevalent dynamics of everyday life in Ürümchi. First, pockets of social and cultural expression existed through informal markets and social networks such as that described in the *kawap* stand. Second, economic inequality divided rural migrants and the urban residents who they served (see Chapter 6). Third, using Halal meat and having distinct Uyghur

food such as *kawap* was an important cultural practice for many Uyghur people in the city (see Chapter 5). Eventually, the institutional surveillance and policing at the neighborhood level would set the groundwork for that *kawap* stand to be demolished and the young men in the story to be displaced back to their hometown in the countryside (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 6).



Figure 1.1: Map of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, highlighted in yellow with the capital city “Urumqi” indicated with a star. The capital city is sometimes spelled “Urumqi” or “Ürümchi,” but I use the Uyghur spelling “Ürümchi” in this dissertation. Xinjiang is located in northwest China and was founded in 1955. Xinjiang is the largest political administrative division in China. Xinjiang encompasses almost 1.6 million square kilometers, which is approximately equal to the size of Alaska. Xinjiang shares a border with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. *Source:* <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang>.

Although Uyghurs are not mobilized for a violent independence movement, the Uyghurs are the center of controversial violence in Xinjiang and throughout China. Ethnic tensions in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region bubbled to the surface during a deadly riot in Ürümchi in July 2009 (Millward 2009; Wong 2009). Violence in the region, especially from 2009-2015, has

led to a tightening of state surveillance, intrusive policing, and restrictions on Muslim religious practice in Xinjiang (Byler 2018; Roberts 2018; Smith Finley 2018; Thum 2018). While Xinjiang may seem an extreme and peripheral example, I draw on Das and Poole (2004, 3) to show that the articulations of the state on its margins are not weaker or less relevant: “Instead, we...reflect on how the practices and politics of life in [territorial or social margins] shaped the political, regulatory, and disciplinary practices that constitute, somehow, that thing we call ‘the state.’” In this dissertation, I examine bureaucracy, policing, and surveillance, as well as the micro-rebellions made by the individual body that defy control, to demonstrate the ways that people experience strong state power in peripheral regions. This work should not be seen as a representative study since each case is different. Instead, the study serves as a window into the mechanisms of power. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001, 37) write, “These spectacles [of the state] only occasionally succeed in producing the specific social effects they aim at, but always reproduce the imagination of the state as the great enframer of our lives.” Despite increasing globalization, the state remains a central institutional figure in everyday life. I examine the operations of the state in an authoritarian context.

The Chinese state considers the Uyghurs to be a significant threat to its territorial integrity and has taken measures to increase security in the region. Satellite images of large internment camps are now available (e.g., Sudworth 2018). Recent analysis of government documents by Zenz (2018) reveals that the Chinese government holds more than 1 million Muslim minorities without trial, which is about 10% of Xinjiang’s Uyghur population. Policing, incarceration, and genocide have historically been used as modes of state control in territorially contested regions. From Guantanamo Bay to migrant detention facilities to prisons to refugee settlements, “camps” are a well-known feature of liberal and illiberal states alike (see Agamben 2003; Koch 2013).

Camps are some of the more discernable forms of state power through incarceration of a minority or otherwise marginalized group. However, a focus in the media and extant literature on the strikingly visible aspects of state power overlooks the invisible and nefarious aspects of the everyday violence of the nation-state. I use long-term ethnographic fieldwork to study some of the more invisible aspects of state power, such as bureaucracy and development discourses. In drawing on observations of tight state control, I answer the questions: What is the role of bureaucracy, policing, surveillance, displacement, and development in securing state territorial control? How do people experience and navigate state dispossession in the political, economic, cultural, and social spheres? I employ the theoretical lenses of the material and ideological state effect, feminist geopolitics, and settler colonialism to better understand the uneven and fractured state territorial control I witnessed.

I. Summary of Findings and Main Arguments: Suffocating and Breathing

While observing the ways people respond to state repression and dispossession of culture and livelihoods, I find a culture of escapism, such as dreaming about going abroad or consuming alcohol.² I describe the tension I witnessed between state control as a metaphor of “suffocating”

² As described in Dautcher (2009), alcohol consumption has long been a cultural tradition for Uyghur men in Xinjiang. This is an obvious and visible contradiction with strict adherence to only eating Halal food, a contradiction my interlocutors were aware of and acknowledged. For Uyghurs in Xinjiang, drinking alcohol is acceptable for many as long as one is not involved in the sale of it. Similarly in Tibet, eating meat is acceptable for many as long as one is not involved in the sale of it. Alcohol is popular among many secular Uyghurs in the urban areas in which I lived. According to people I talked to, refraining from or giving up alcohol is only recent development among older and rural populations. Refraining from alcohol is accompanied by other burgeoning forms of increasing religiosity among Uyghurs, such as wearing the headscarf, in the 2000s. It is only since 2017 that reports emerged of forced alcohol drinking by the state as a way to denounce Islam; I did not witness or hear about such forced drinking during my fieldwork. During my fieldwork, alcohol drinking and cigarette smoking was commonly practiced by secular, young, urban Uyghurs as a form of entertainment that they did not see as contradicting their Muslim beliefs or practices. See Chapter 5 for more details.

and escapism as “breathing” as a constant process in overlapping spaces and times. Take for example the following vignette of a typical walk through the Uyghur urban district called Tengritagh in Ürümchi.

In September 2016 on a Friday around noon, I walked down an alley on my way to study at a coffee shop.³ Suddenly I was surrounded on all sides by clean-shaven young men carrying prayer mats rolled up and tucked tightly between their ribs and upper arms. Uyghur men under 65-years of age were strictly forbidden from growing beards, though mustaches were allowed.⁴ Careful to not be late, they walked briskly or jogged towards the mosque as we heard the call to prayer in the distance. I walked past the neighborhood park on my way there. Inside Uyghur boys were playing soccer and Uyghur families were picnicking on the grass, some of them sipping cans of beer. A sign on the park gates read, “Launch an eradication of pornography, gambling and illegal publications, and purify society’s environment” (see Figure 1.2).⁵ The poster clearly defined illegal publications as any type of religious education materials (see Dautcher 2009 on how the state labels “illegal religious activity” as a way to justify arrests of Uyghurs). Equating religious education with morally questionable activities such as porn and gambling was a common theme in the state propaganda (see Chapter 4).

³ In this dissertation, I use past tense except for when making generalizations about my own or others’ scholarly analysis as a whole.

⁴ At the time of this observation, men over 65 often grew long beards in accordance with Muslim custom. In 2018, I heard reports that even mustaches were no longer allowed on men of all ages.

⁵ Ch: 开展扫黄打非, 净化社会环境



Figure 1.2: A sign on the gates that surround the local park with instructions in Chinese and Uyghur. The illustration shows how to “sweep away” porn, gambling, and illegal publications. The illustration shows a man with a Muslim cap (*doppa*) to emphasize that one can still be culturally Uyghur and adhere to state policies around religious restrictions. *Source*: Photo by author in September 2016.

A black van reading “public safety”⁶ with bars on its windows rumbled past, its blue and red lights flashing. Even though it was not a holiday, the mosque was so full that men placed their prayer mats outside the mosque gates on the sidewalk. A military post sat across the street from the mosque. Three Han Chinese men stood facing the mosque and held their fingers on the triggers of their semi-automatic rifles. The men were wearing camouflage, helmets, and riot shields with

⁶ Ch: 公安 *gong'an*

“Armed Police”⁷ printed on the front. They stood closely together back-to-back in a fully enclosed gated structure that read in large yellow Chinese characters, “Please don’t get too close”⁸ and “Prohibited to pass through.”⁹

This snapshot of a typical scene on a Friday at noon during a 15-minute walk through the Uyghur enclave in a Chinese city, Ürümqi, during 2016 encapsulates a paradox of everyday life: On the one hand, the security state intrudes into people’s everyday lives. In the midst of a state that equates porn, drugs, and religious materials as the poster declares, it is relatively easy to be arrested as a criminal for any type of activity or paraphernalia, from social media posts to attending mosque. On the other hand, actual state control is uneven. For example, despite the ever-expanding military police presence and bureaucratic state control in Ürümqi, religious practices persist in this example.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the military post’s presence with a warning of “please don’t get too close” provides an image of a frightful and militarized state apparatus that creates a destabilizing effect through an unreachable and unknowable presence. While at times the state imposes a suffocating and visible presence, at other times the state is invisible, confusing, and difficult to know or encounter.

In other spaces and times, Uyghurs find ways to create physical and psychological escapism and coping mechanisms, often through cultural performances that demonstrate affiliation with a broader Turkic and Muslim world (see Chapter 5). Deconstructing territory and scale reveals

⁷ Ch: 武警 *wujing*

⁸ Ch: 请勿靠近 *qingwu kaojin*

⁹ Ch: 禁止通行 *jinzhi tongxing*

¹⁰ Mosque attendance started to drop in 2017 when an ID scan became required to enter and people were disappearing into re-education camps.

that the state is fractured and spatial production occurs by multiple actors in material and symbolic spaces.

As shown in the picture of the propaganda on the park gate above, gates around the city line the sidewalks and streets, as well block entrances to parks, entire neighborhoods, apartment complexes, and buildings (see Figure 1.3). The gates form a material and cultural landscape in the city. The gates create and maintain a paradoxical relationship of the Uyghurs as always included, but inevitably separate from the Han majority society and Han controlled state. The gates lining streets, sidewalks, and buildings throughout the city, but especially in the Uyghur neighborhoods, symbolically declare to the Uyghurs, “You are different, you are separate from us, and we don’t trust you.” Yet, the gates enclose Uyghurs in the state, symbolically and materially reminding them they are still in China and Chinese citizens (see Caldeira 2000 for a discussion of gates and citizenship in the Brazilian context). The gates keep Uyghurs connected to the state, and yet always separate from the state and society. In this way, Uyghurs are always marginalized and controlled (see also Das and Poole 2004). While there are gates in the Han neighborhoods too, the gates there are constructed to keep the “dangerous Uyghurs” out.



Figure 1.3: Photo of some of the many gates that surround city parks and sidewalks, as shown in the foreground and background. The sign reads in Uyghur: “Friendly reminder: For the pedestrians passing through the streets, please carefully raise attention and prevent against thievery!!!” (*semimiy eskertish: yoldin otivatqan yolochilar hoshyarliqni osturup, oghridin saqininglar [sic]!!!*). Source: Photo by author in February 2017.

When I first arrived in Xinjiang in 2014, I saw the gates guarded by police and security checks everywhere, and wrote in my field journal, “The city is an active prison. The people here are caged like criminals, guilty before proven innocent, and constantly under surveillance” (2014 field notes). However, I later realized that the reality is much more complicated than that: “The

[security] gates to some of the alleys stay open and unmanned, while permanent gates line the pedestrian areas. On one side of the street, I saw a young man slip under and through a gap in the gate where three pickets had been broken and removed” (2014 field notes). Despite the gates restricting mobility, this young man ignored the gates.

While the state builds the gates, the people slip through gates during everyday life. The gates are often jumped or broken, which signifies the ways people ignore the state, but also the ways that the physical infrastructure is crumbling. The gates are symbolic measures of state control of territory: prohibitive, cursory, and in some ways deteriorating. Sometimes those gates are left open or unmanned, and sometimes the gates are accidentally or deliberately broken. Either way, opportunities arise to slip past state power. While the building of the gates is suffocating, slipping through them is breathing in a metaphorical sense that involves both physical and psychological modes of escapism.

The uneven distribution of state power is expected. For example, Reeves et al. (2014) uncovers ethnographies of the state where people experience elsewhere in Central Asia the military and bureaucratic presence of the illiberal state as both close and distant. While the control/freedom and structure/agency relationship is familiar in the social sciences, my work contributes to a better understanding of the material and symbolic nature of state territorialization in settler colonial and authoritarian contexts. In Xinjiang, I find that even in a strong, authoritarian state with a monopoly on power and seemingly almost unlimited surveillance and policing capabilities, state space is fractured and uneven.

The Chinese government enforces territorial control and creates a new landscape in Xinjiang through police stations, Chinese flags, and transportation infrastructure. While Uyghurs are irrevocably Chinese citizens of the state, they also do their best to separate themselves

culturally from the Han Chinese by creating their own landscapes through mosque construction or Halal food (see also Dautcher 2009, 49). Uyghur landscapes and cultural performances reflect affiliation with the Muslim world that disrupt the imagined space of the Chinese nation-state. Through fashion choices (such as wearing the headscarf) or home decorations (such as Arabic calligraphy wall-hangings), for example, practices of everyday life put holes in the idea of Chinese territorial control as an all-encompassing static container (Taylor 1994). How does China maintain control over territorially contested regions such as Xinjiang? How do ethnic majority and minority citizens in China experience and respond to state power in their everyday lives?

In Chapter 4, I examine how the state maintains territorial control through bureaucratic rule-making. In Chapter 5, I look at everyday forms of quiet opposition to the police through survivance strategies. In Chapter 6, I analyze how the state maintains territorial control through policing, displacement, and dispossession of rural migrants. In Chapter 7, I show how development discourses in the local and migrant Han ethnic majority population help to maintain settler colonialism and the establishment of political legitimacy for the CCP.

I highlight multiscale power relations and networks understood beyond and within nation-states. I interrogate the meaning of territory by examining political, economic, and cultural linkages at the scales of the neighborhood, market, household, and body. I analyze the themes of the state effect, feminist geopolitics, and settler colonialism. I emphasize that authoritarian control is intermittent and divided. I find that the Uyghur community I interacted with during my fieldwork experiences surveillance and policing not as a blanket but as a net, where people create holes or bubbles within the net to temporarily escape repression. The invisible aspects of the everyday violence of the nation-state play a major role in spatial production. However, the current situation in Xinjiang cannot be understood outside of the historical context.

II. Historical Context

A. History of the Political, Economic, and Cultural Integration of Xinjiang into China during the Qing Dynasty

The history of Xinjiang is highly contested because Chinese and Uyghurs claim opposing territorial rights to the land through archeological and historical evidence. Place names are thus highly controversial. The area known today as “Southern Xinjiang”¹¹ is also referred to as the “Tarim Basin”¹² to describe the drainage basin of the Tarim River that surrounds the Taklamakan Desert. The Tarim Basin is surrounded by the Tianshan and Kunlun Mountains that provide the glacial melt that feeds the Tarim River (see Figure 1.4).



Figure 1.4: Map of the Tarim Basin and Taklamakan Desert, indicated in yellow, that marks the geographical region of the Uyghur homeland in what is today known as Southern Xinjiang. Ürümchi (spelled Ürümqi here) is farther north in a historically Mongolian region. *Source:* Knusser, A. Digital Chart of the World and GTOPO data, labels based on GEONet accessed at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taklamakan_Desert.

¹¹ Ch: 南疆 *Nanjiang*

¹² Uy: *Tarim Uymanliqi*

The Tarim Basin was historically the center of frequent wars for control, especially between the Chinese, Mongol, and Turkic empires. In 60 BCE, during the Han Dynasty, the Chinese took control of the Tarim Basin region for the first time in an effort to secure the trade routes through the region. The desert was incorporated into the Chinese empire as a “protectorate” called Xiyu,¹³ which means “Western Region.” Throughout the rest of Chinese imperial history, the Tarim Basin region sometimes served as tributary to the Chinese imperial dynasties, paying taxes and trading jade, but otherwise engaged with relatively minimal involvement. It was not until the Qing Dynasty (~1644-1912) that the Tarim Basin region began to become significantly integrated into China in economic, political, and cultural aspects (Perdue 2005).

During the Chinese imperial period, a distinction between the “civilized” Chinese (华 *Hua*) versus the “barbaric” tributaries (夷 *Yi*) was created and enforced. The Chinese character “Yi” (夷) is variously translated into English as “alien” or “barbarian,” or simply “non-Han people.” The alterity of *Hua* versus *Yi* peoples provided the historical foundation for a Sino-centric identity based on discourses of civilization superior to the peripheral regions (Leibold 2007; Basu 2014).

The Qing Dynasty era comprised a complicated history with the peripheral borderlands because its rulers were not the majority Han people. Instead, the Qing era was ruled by a group called the Manchu from Manchuria located in present-day northeast China. Today the Manchu are classified as one of the 55 ethnic minorities in China called *Manzu* (Ch: 满族). The Manchu as minority rulers created a sometimes controversial and contradictory relationship between Han, Manchu, and Yi. Millward and Newby (2006, 127) point out that the *Hua* versus *Yi* distinction, which can be traced throughout many of the imperial dynasties, was downplayed and even

¹³ Ch: 西域

sometimes “muted” in Qing documents because the Manchu, a minority themselves, wanted to downplay discourses of the Han as “civilized” and “superior.” Because the Qing Dynasty was geographically vast and demographically diverse, historians have urged to move away from Sino-centric narratives for understanding this time.

The territorial expansion of the Qing involved conquest and struggle in Xinjiang that plays a central role in Chinese history. Repeated rebellions against central Chinese rule were recorded in Xinjiang throughout the 1800s and 1900s (Perdue 2005). However, information on responses to imperial rule of minority peoples is limited due to the Chinese state’s control and manipulation of the Qing historical narrative (Duara 1995). The official Chinese state historical narrative downplays Qing territorial expansion as a peripheral part of history and a story of solidarity and unification, rather than a more accurate telling of conquest and colonization (Millward 1996; Bulag 2002; Perdue 2005).

Beginning in the early 18th century, the Manchu Qing rulers began the integration of Xinjiang as a colonial tributary through economic development, diplomacy, and military domination (Perdue 2005). Economic development involved the funding of imperial state subsidized irrigation and agricultural farms throughout Xinjiang, and funded Han immigration to work on these farms. Diplomacy meant allowing local leaders to stay in power: This phase did not involve aggressive political integration yet, but instead indirect governance (Newby 2005). Military domination included land settlement by soldiers and establishment of military colonies. Historians often mark 1759 as the year that the Manchu-led Qing Dynasty officially conquered the region and renamed it Xinjiang,¹⁴ meaning “New Frontier” (Millward 1998).

¹⁴ Ch: 新疆

Until the late 19th century, however, the Qing military conquest did not involve any intentional “civilizing projects” or directed *cultural* assimilation (Millward and Newby 2006). Instead, “Qing policies of control were built on coercion, commercial incentives, and the active promotion of colonial settlement. Military force came first” (Millward and Perdue 2004, 57). The Manchu Qing generally did not engage in acculturation of minorities during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Schluessel (2016, 7) refers to Xinjiang during this period of indirect rule from around 1700-1877 as an “Inner Asian territory of a Manchu empire” to emphasize that Han Chinese influence was minimal.

However, 1877 marked a significant year of change for Muslims in Xinjiang. In 1877, Han Chinese commanders led by the infamously brutal Zuo Zongtang began remaking, or in Chinese terms “reconstructing,” the Tarim Basin based on Han culture and the Chinese language (Millward 1998; Schluessel 2016).¹⁵ The “reconstruction” period marked a shift from Xinjiang’s status as a territory of the Manchu empire to a Chinese province (Schluessel 2016, 7). Beginning in 1877, the Qing empire, with the help of Han Chinese military commanders, facilitated aggressive, violent, and directed political and cultural assimilation of Muslims in Xinjiang into the Han Chinese center (Millward 1996; Millward and Perdue 2004; Millward and Tursun 2004). Millward and Tursun (2004) show that there was intensified promotion of Han immigration to Xinjiang after 1884. Schluessel (2016, 6) writes that “Xinjiang in the late Qing [was] the period of Han dominance and the active Sinicization of the region’s Muslims.” Both Sinicization and modernization narratives of Xinjiang, and the more diverse, non-Han perspectives of the Manchu dominance in Xinjiang, were crucial in shaping the late Qing period (Schluessel 2016, 7).

¹⁵ Chinese historians use the word “reconstruction” as a translation of the Chinese term 善後 *shanhou*, sometimes also translated as “rebuilding,” to describe Xinjiang during the period of transition from late imperial to modern China (1877-1949).

Qing-era documents involved representations of the periphery as economically backward and culturally uncivilized, desperately in need of modernization projects (Harrell 1995). In the documents, the Qing portrayed themselves as the benevolent harbingers of civilized culture and modernization to the periphery (Leibold 2007). These discourses facilitated the Qing imperial state's creation of legible state spaces of governance in the frontiers (Scott 1998; Crossley et al. 2006). Leibold (2007) argues that the male elites of the Qing Dynasty succeeded in creating a unified empire by manipulating the narrative to be one of linear progression on the road towards advancing modernity (see also Duara 1995). While the documents indicate civilization projects, little evidence shows that these projects were implemented on the ground in Xinjiang until 1877 (Millward and Newby 2006).

Qing officials also recorded that Muslims were inherently violent, constituting a biological and racial component of cultural difference (Lipman 2006). These efforts perpetuated the perceived biological inferiority of Muslims, which worked paradoxically to facilitate assimilation efforts: While they were deemed inferior, cultural assimilation efforts were needed, the documents read. The tension exemplifies the contradictions between assimilation and segregation of the peripheries, a debate that would continue throughout the next decades as China grappled with questions of the modern nation-state.

The combination of these economic, cultural, military, discursive, and political efforts combined with Han immigration to Xinjiang integrated Xinjiang into the central Qing imperial state most aggressively during the 19th century (Millward 2007). In short, various imperial discourses of superiority of the core and inferiority of the periphery, economic colonization through agricultural farms, subsidized Han immigration, military presence, modernization efforts, and acculturation interventions defined Xinjiang during the Qing dynasty (Newby 2005).

B. Background Information on Minzu and Ethnicity: United among Difference

The word “*minzu*” is used in Chinese to describe ethnic groups. The word *minzu* is ambiguous. It can mean “nationality” or “ethnicity,” and the word “*minzu*” includes the Han Chinese as one of the many *minzu* “indigenous” to China. The Chinese character “*min*” (民) can be translated into English as “people, subjects, or citizens.” The word “*zu*” (族) is often translated as “a family clan, ethnic group, or tribe.” The combined characters form the word “*minzu*” (Ch: 民族), which is today translated into English as “nationality” or “ethnic group.”¹⁶ Formerly, the official Chinese state translation of *minzu* into English was “nationality,” suggesting that multiple nations existed within the Chinese state. When the official Chinese government English translation of *minzu* changed from “nationality” to “ethnicity” in the 1990s, the shift appeared to be a tool of state rhetoric to suppress independent nationalist sentiments of the minority *minzu* groups (Barabantseva 2008).

The inherent tension in the multiple conceptions of China as a “unified yet diverse” multi-*minzu* state¹⁷ is exemplified in the ambiguous term in Chinese for “the Chinese people” (Ch: 中华民族 *zhonghua minzu*). The term *zhonghua minzu* as “the Chinese people” includes the identity of both Han and non-Han people in China as a civic national identity. The minority *minzu* constitute

¹⁶ See Leibold (2007, 8) for a detailed explanation and etymology of the term *minzu* with its roots in German and Japanese. Bovingdon (2010) suggests that the Soviets and Europeans avoided this problem with careful distinctions in nomenclature that divided the main nationality with minority ethnic groups, whereas the Chinese perhaps opened themselves up for minority national consciousness by using the same word (*minzu*) for both nationality and ethnicity: “...the instability of the term *minzu* has, from the vantage of the state, dangerously exposed it to political manipulation from below” (Bovingdon 2010, 16).

¹⁷ Ch: 统一的多民族国家

a different and yet inalienable part of China, where tension exists between assimilation and segregation of the peripheral regions.

The sentiment of “unified yet diverse” civic nationalism is expressed in the following phrase that proliferates throughout Xinjiang, where pomegranates are Chinese symbols of the “exoticism” of the region: “Be similar to pomegranate seeds and hug tightly together.”¹⁸ The metaphor symbolizes the different *minzu* as pomegranate seeds that are inherently separate and united at the same time (see Figure 1.5).



Figure 1.5: A propaganda poster on a banister in Ürümchi, Xinjiang declaring the sentiment of uniting like pomegranate seeds. Such messages are often accompanied, as seen here, by a photo of representatives of the 56 nationalities of China along with other slogans, such as, “Live together, study together, be happy together” as the Chinese and Uyghur scripts at the top of the poster declare. *Source:* Photo by author in 2016.

¹⁸ Ch: 像石榴籽那样，紧紧抱在一起, Uy: *anarning danisidek zich uyushushi kerek*. The Uyghur can be translated into English somewhat differently than the Chinese. In this version, the Uyghur means something closer to the English equivalent of, “We need to unite and join together like the compact pomegranate seeds.” They do not use the Uyghur word for hug, which has an infantile connotation, instead opting to use the word “*uyushush*,” which means to unite. They also use the verb “*kerek*” which signifies a sense of imperative urgency, and can be translated into English to mean “should” or “need.”

C. Transitioning from Empire to Nation-State: Republican Era (1912-1949) State Conceptions of Peripheral Minorities

The Qing-era narratives that disguised the contestation and struggle of territorial control in Xinjiang became especially important in the transition from empire to state in the early twentieth century (Leibold 2006). Beginning around 1912, government discourses shifted focus from “Hua versus Yi differences” to striving for a “unified nation-state” fiercely opposed to European and Japanese imperialism and devoted to achieving modernity (Liu 2004). These discourses against the imperialism and colonialism of Japan and the West form the foundation of China’s sensitivity toward the term “settler colonialism” (Bulag 2002). Political elites during the Republican era “reimagined China as a unified yet inclusive *Zhonghua* nation state,” a desire shared by both the Nationalist and Communist parties to “suture together a new national fabric that would firmly fit around the vast political boundaries of the old Qing empire” (Leibold 2007, 12). Chinese nationalism was formed in the Republican Era in triad relationships, where the Chinese nation was built on fear of outside imperial Japanese, European, or Soviet alliances with minorities (Bulag 2010). Historical narratives of national unification in spatial homogeneity and temporal infinity, as well as discourses of superiority over the peripheries, is a component of modern nation building that China embraced (Duara 1995; Leibold 2007).

The debate in conceptualizing the nation comprised of “China as one race” versus “China as multiple *minzu*” was especially important during the transition from the imperial period to the modern nation-state (Leibold 2006; Brophy 2016). Connor (1984) provides evidence that Chiang Kai-Shek, China’s intermittent chairman from ~1928-1949 (and later in Taiwan until 1975) and leader of the Kuomintang (KMT) Nationalist Party, supported the “one race” discourse and never intended to have a multi-*minzu* republic. The KMT leaders argued that a multi-*minzu* civic nationalism would not exist; rather *everyone* would be considered “Chinese” under Chinese ethnic

nationalism. Historians emphasize that Chiang Kai-Shek's support of the one race discourse allowed the CCP, inspired by the Stalin and the Soviet Union, to step in with a false promise and narrative of self-determination for all *minzu*, which facilitated garnering support from the minority regions for military and political success in 1949 (Connor 1984; Bovingdon 2004). In other words, the peripheral minorities did not support the one race discourse espoused during the Republican era. The false promises of self-determination allowed the CCP to win support of the minorities, and the minorities played a military and political role in the Communists' success in 1949 (Connor 1984; Bovingdon 2004, 2010). Whether or not the CCP's original vision aligned with the "one race" versus "multi-*minzu*" vision of a Chinese nation is unclear. What is clear is that the Communists knew that a unified and inclusive *zhonghua* nation state was needed to defend against imperialism and achieve modernity, and that promising self-determination for the minorities was key in winning the civil war. After 1949, CCP officials declared the minority regions "autonomous," but in the end did not grant them functional self-determination.

It should also be noted that the Uyghur homeland experienced two eras of national independence called the "East Turkestan Republic" (ETR). In the 1920s, nationalism as inspired by Stalin enthralled Uyghur intellectuals and inspired them to negotiate for national independence. From 1933-1934, the East Turkestan Republic achieved official recognition in the Soviet Union and China (Klimeš 2015; Brophy 2016). The East Turkestan Republic again had a brief period of independence from 1944-1945.

D. Mao Era (1949-1978) of CCP Conceptions of the Peripheral Minorities: Social Science and Modernization Projects

Anthropological and scientific *minzu* classification was an important part of the broader nationalization and modernization projects of the Mao era from 1949-1976 (Fei 1982; Gladney 1994). In 1954, Chinese state officials teamed up with leading Chinese university ethnologists in

order to categorize different *minzu* living within Chinese state borders (Mullaney 2010). It is important to note that this categorization project occurred primarily in Southwest China, far from Xinjiang in the Northwest.

I first outline some important differences in the historical and social contexts of Northwest and Southwest China to help situate the subsequent discussion of the *minzu* literature.¹⁹ Many of the important *minzu* texts, such as Mullaney (2010), were based on studies focused on SW China. Some important differences in the contexts between NW and SW China include historical experiences. For example, parts of Xinjiang and Mongolia were colonized during the 18th century, with directed, violent, and intense political and cultural assimilation along with state financed Han immigration beginning in the late 19th century (Perdue 2005). However, for many of the SW Chinese *minzu* groups (not including Tibet), *minzu* categorization and direct contact with the Han Chinese state in terms of development projects and Han immigration did not begin until the 1950s (Mullaney 2010). Another contextual difference is that Uyghurs and Mongols have more transnational affiliations and connections that may help reinforce Chinese state fear about independent nationalisms. Uyghur historical and cultural affiliation with the Turkish and Persian empires resulted in transnational identities and exchange with the Muslim community and Central Asia in both historical and contemporary times (Thum 2014). These transnational connections combined with greater contact with ever-increasing numbers of Han immigrants may have resulted in more solidified pan-Uyghur identity than the *minzu* identities experienced in SW China (Roberts 2004). The minority *minzu* in SW China are relatively isolated from each other and other transnational groups and identities. While some, such as the Miao/Hmong, may be connected, they

¹⁹ I refer here to the literature on *minzu* in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi, not Tibet. Because Tibet exhibits a unique context different from the SW China literature and NW China literature, I do not include a discussion of Tibet here when referring to “SW China.”

are not groups with their own state nor do they generally espouse state territorial claims or national independence the way Uyghurs have done in NW China.

Finally, while Muslims and people in NW China are often portrayed as inherently violent (Lipman 2006), people in SW China have often been portrayed as exotic and sexual objects of the tourist's gaze (Oakes 1993; Schein 2000). Because of a desire and nostalgia for the untouched cultural heritage of the "authentic" traditions of minorities, SW China has experienced state territorialization through Han tourists and development of a cultural heritage tourism industry (Oakes 1999; Yeh 2013). In contrast, minorities in the NW have experienced territorialization through economic development projects, especially oil, natural gas, and coal extraction, rapid urbanization, and massive Han immigration (Woodworth 2012; Cliff 2013; Brox and Beller-Hann 2014).

In 1954, during the Chinese state's categorization of *minzu* in SW China, state officials pushed for an adoption of Stalin's definition of nationality.²⁰ Meanwhile, the social scientists on the team also utilized definitions based on Western anthropological conceptions of ethnicity (Mullaney 2010). The Western conceptions of ethnicity founded on the anthropological sciences employed by the Chinese ethnologists were primarily based on British ethnolinguistic practices of identification in Burma and historical legacies of Christian missionaries' recorded classifications (Mullaney 2010). While over 400 different groups in SW China self-identified, state classification concerned obtaining a more "manageable" number, eventually ending up with a total of 55 minority *minzu*. Mullaney (2010) thus argues that *minzu* classification was as much a project of the "governmentality of the social sciences" as it was a project of the state.

²⁰ Nationality is defined by Stalin as a "historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Stalin 1994 [1913], 20).

Once classified as distinct *minzu* groups, the “minorities”²¹ were objects of modernization projects during the Mao era. This included infrastructure projects such as dams, schools, and land and agricultural collectivization. Economic development projects facilitated the process of colonization and integration of the periphery into the core (Wallerstein 1984).

E. Post-Reform China from 1979 to Present: The Open Up the West Campaign in Xinjiang

The state conceptions of peripheral minorities in post-reform China (~1979-present) revolve around discourses of economic development. The “Open Up the West” campaign is the most prominent of the state-directed economic development projects of the peripheral regions. The Open Up the West campaign’s goal is to placate ethnopolitical “unrest” or splittism,” and integrate the periphery more closely with the center (Becquelin 2004). The contemporary literature around economic development in Xinjiang revolve around three main issues: 1) integration of the center and periphery through assimilation and territorialization, 2) Han immigration, and 3) growing inequality along ethnic lines (Becquelin 2004; Barabantseva 2009; Beller-Hann 2014).

Most authors claim that economic development has *not* led to a more “harmonious society” in Xinjiang (Becquelin 2004; Bovington 2010; Finley 2013; Brox and Beller-Hann 2014), especially as a result of resentment from increasing levels of Han immigration (Toops 2004). Most authors agree that a recent dramatic increase in Han immigration is the main cause of unrest in Xinjiang (Bovington 2002, 2004, 2010; Becquelin 2004; Rossabi 2004; Cliff 2009; Caprioni 2011; Harlan and Webber 2012; Finley 2013; Beller-Hann 2014). Other causes of dissatisfaction and resentment include: state control over land, mobility, and birth control (Beller-Hann 1997); economic inequality (Beller-Hann 1997; Benson 2004; Bovington 2010; Finley 2013); the Chinese as “violators” of the moral code of Islam and source of memories of oppression during

²¹ Ch: 少数民族 *shaoshu minzu*

Maoism (Beller-Hann 1998); destruction of culture for the sake of modernization (Beller-Hann 2014); false promises of political autonomy (Bovingdon 2004; Rossabi 2004); cultural assimilation and territorial integration through development and modernization efforts through the XPCC/*bingtuan* as state engineering to encourage settlers (Becquelin 2004); state categorization of ethnic identity (Gladney 2004; Ma 2013); unequal access to healthcare (Dautcher 2004); and bilingual education (Schluessel 2007; Beller-Hann 2014). While increasing dissatisfaction with Han Chinese rule in Xinjiang is an example of the ways in which economic development alienates minority *minzu* from the Chinese state, there are many reasons for resentment beyond distribution of wealth and Han immigration.

F. Uyghur Identity in the PRC

Within the broader theme of Uyghur identity in the literature, there are two main themes: the extent of the role of the state in the construction of a pan-Uyghur identity, and the importance of Islam in Uyghur identity. Most authors agree that the Chinese state has been unsuccessful in their attempts to make Uyghurs think of themselves as members of the Chinese (中华 *zhonghua*) family (Bovingdon 2002). Some authors attribute the formation of the Uyghur identity almost entirely as a reaction to the Chinese state (Gladney 2004), and maintain that Uyghur identity formed at least partially out of reaction to the resentment, distrust, and hatred of the Han Chinese and the Chinese state (Rudelson 1997; Dautcher 2009; Bovingdon 2010; Beller-Hann 2014). On the other hand, Millward and Perdue (2004) point out that Xinjiang was always characterized by outside influences and constant trade and interaction with other cultures. Millennia of foreign influence in the Tarim Basin certainly had an effect on Uyghur identity formation, who see themselves as a people with deep Turkic roots with strong Persian, Indian, and Arabic influence in language, music, art, and religion (Thum 2014).

However, Thum (2014) argues that Uyghur identity was *not* simply a function of the Chinese state, nor grassroots movements against the Chinese state. Thum (2014) shows historically Uyghur identity was not only limited to oasis identities (e.g., Kashgarian, Hotanian) as Rudelson (1997) had claimed. Rather, Thum (2014) illustrates that oasis and class identities have become relatively *less* salient in recent years as a pan-Uyghur identity has become more dominant in the last century. He draws on Anderson's (2006 [1983]) idea of the imagined community to say that mobility and the pilgrimage tradition as related to historical novels were key to forming a unified nationalism and identity among the Uyghurs. While Rudelson (1997) pointed out the rural/urban, peasant/intellectual, and secular/religious social cleavages among Uyghurs, Thum (2014) points to the roots of Uyghur identity in shrine pilgrimage tradition that bound people together in telling stories of a coherent and unified Uyghur national history (see also Smith Finley 2013).

The broader pan-Turkic identity is also a major component of modern Uyghur identity (Dwyer 2005; Dautcher 2009; Erkin 2009; Thum 2014). Islam is another important node of identity formation for the Uyghurs, as it connects them as a group as well as to important transnational connections to Turkic and Muslim worlds (Roberts 2004; Finley 2013). Bovingdon (2010) makes the point that Uyghur intellectuals use nationalism rather than Islam to advocate for a united identity among Uyghurs (see also Dautcher 2009). Beller-Hann (1997, 1998), on the other hand, emphasizes that Islamic identity and religious authority are very important in Uyghur peasants' lives. Roberts (2004) shows that connections to Central Asia since the early 1990s provides support to local Xinjiang Muslims who are discontent, and these interactions lead to increased critical cultural links to other Muslims who support Xinjiang's independence. Islam is an important source of morality, cultural identity and social membership for Uyghurs from different socioeconomic backgrounds, though it is more pronounced among rural Uyghurs from Southern Xinjiang. I extend

the current literature on Uyghur identity with a discussion of uneven state territorialization to help shed light on the role of the state effect, geopolitics, and colonialism in shaping everyday life in Xinjiang.

III. Demographic Context of Xinjiang

After the *minzu* project of classification was completed, the official designation of political autonomous regions, prefectures, and counties where minority *minzu* had majority or plurality populations began. Though Xinjiang is labeled the “Uyghur autonomous region,” Xinjiang is actually a patchwork of many different Hui, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Mongol prefectures. The prefectures in Xinjiang effectively segregate the Uyghur prefectures to the northeastern and southwestern sections of Xinjiang (see Figure 1.6). Bovingdon (2004) contends that when Xinjiang was founded in 1955, the geographic divisions between Uyghur prefectures to disparate sections of Xinjiang were an intentional effort to prevent solidarity and political organization among the Uyghurs. For more information about the legal framework of “autonomy” in the PRC and Xinjiang, see Bovingdon (2004).



Map 4.1 Autonomous Prefectures in Xinjiang

Figure 1.6: Political map of Xinjiang. The prefectures in white are the Uyghur prefectures. The dark gray are Kazakh prefectures and the light gray are Kirghiz, Mongol, and Hui prefectures. The other prefectures show that Xinjiang's Uyghur areas are separated by Hui, Kazakh, Kirghiz and Mongol prefectures. *Source:* Map by Bovington (2004, 119).

A. Demographics

Chinese governments have financed Han migration to Xinjiang since the 1800s (Perdue 2005; Millward 2007). The Chinese state continues to use Han migration as a tool of state control of the region (Cliff 2009; Bovington 2010). The Han population of Xinjiang was recorded at 200,000 in 1944. Only five percent of Xinjiang's population was Han in 1949 (Dautcher 2009, 49). After additional state-directed immigration began in 1950, the Han population increased to 5 million in 1975 and 9 million in 2010 (Bovington 2010, 11-12). Today the total population of

Xinjiang totals almost 23 million people, comprised of approximately 10 million Uyghurs, 9 million Han Chinese (not including military troops stationed there), and 4 million Mongols, Kazakh, Hui and other Chinese minority *minzu* (Toops 2004; Dautcher 2009, 49). The dramatic increase of Han migrants shows patterns of settler colonialism. Furthermore, Dautcher (2009, 57) records that there were “discriminatory zoning regulations and the coerced sale of Uyghur-owned land to Han in-migrants” in Xinjiang during the 1990s.

Due to the discovery of significant coal, oil, and natural gas reserves, Xinjiang’s nominal GDP grew to about \$162 billion USD in 2017, ranking Xinjiang that year as 21st out of 31 Chinese provinces for per capita GDP. Spatial segregation and economic inequality along ethnic lines occurs on multiple scales in Xinjiang. While the Han Chinese occupy the majority of the wealthier northern cities in Xinjiang, Uyghurs occupy a majority of the poorer southern and eastern rural areas. The poorest regions in Xinjiang are the majority Uyghur areas in southern Xinjiang. Southern Xinjiang’s per capita GDP is half that of the rest of the province, highlighting the economic inequality of the region along ethnic lines (see maps in Figure 1.7).

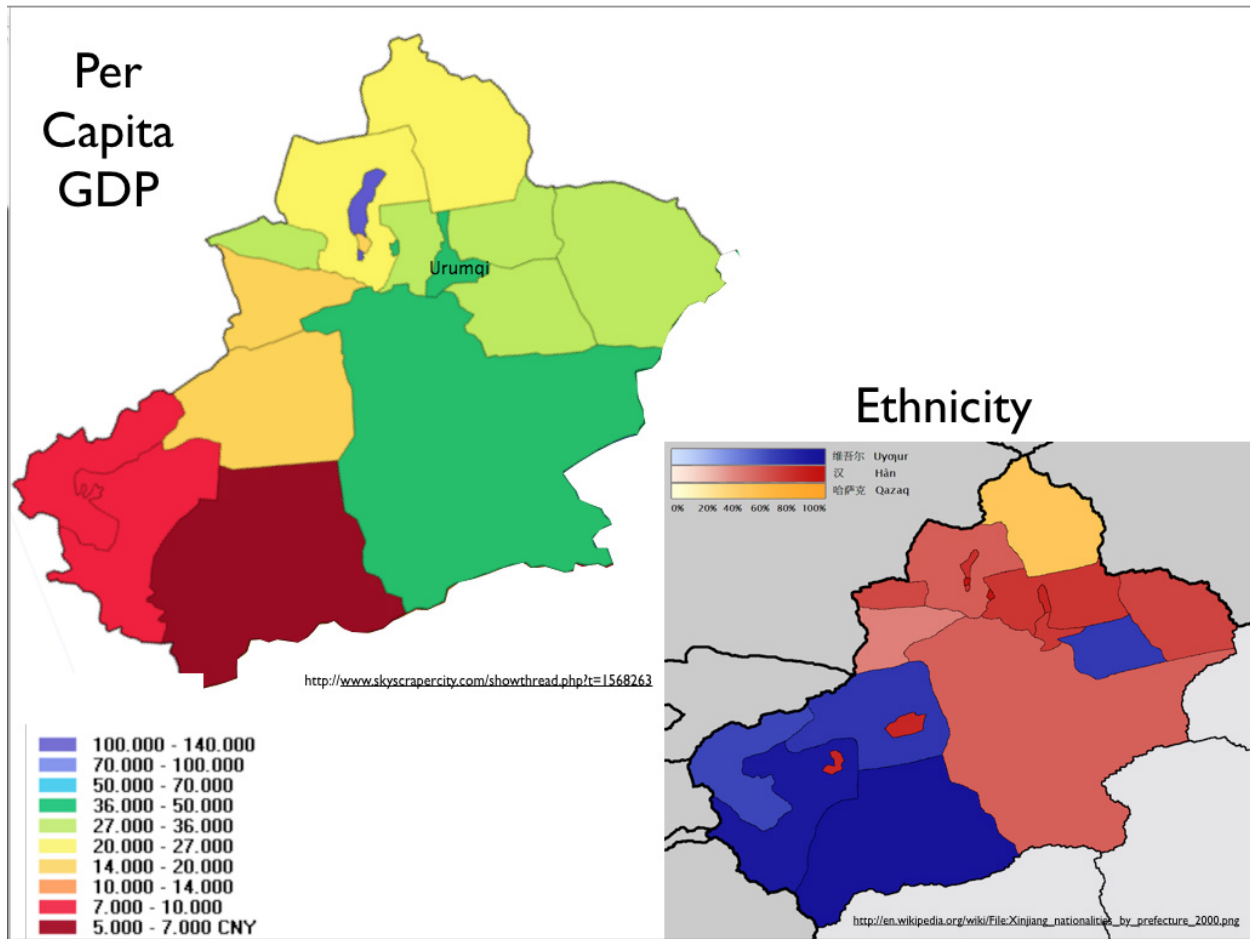


Figure 1.7: These two maps give a general picture of the demographic and wealth distribution in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The borders delineate prefectures within the region. The map on the left illustrates the GDP per capita in 2010, which shows that most of the poverty in Xinjiang is concentrated in the southwestern region. The calculation is given in Chinese currency (CNY), where the exchange rate with USD is approximately 6:1. Thus the per capita GDP for three poorest prefectures in Xinjiang is \$760-\$1,500 USD a year. The purple section on the left per capita GDP map (\$15,000 USD) map is Karamay, where most of Xinjiang’s oil extraction is occurring. The map on the right uses census data from 2000 (blue is majority Uyghur, red is majority Han, and yellow is majority Kazakh), and illustrates that most of the Uyghur population is concentrated in the southwest. The patches of red signaling Han-majority areas in the middle of the blue sections in the south are the Han-controlled military agricultural farms run by the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, known as “*bingtuan*” in Chinese.

Source:

<http://www.geocurrents.info/geonotes/xinjiang-china-ethnicity-and-economic-development>.

Ürümchi, the capital city of Xinjiang, is located in northern Xinjiang and thus is not a traditional part of the historic Uyghur homeland of the Tarim Basin. Ürümchi, with a registered

population of about 3 million, is also highly segregated along ethnic lines. In 1960, there were around 480,00 Han Chinese and 76,500 Uyghurs in Ürümchi (Millward 2007, 260). According to the 2010 census by the Chinese government, Ürümchi had 2.3 million Han residents and the city was at least 75% Han. In 2010, there was an enclave of about 388,000 Uyghurs in the south of the city at 12% of the city's population (the remaining 13% is made up of other Chinese minority *minzu* such as the Hui). The city of Ürümchi is divided administratively into sub-city level districts. Two of the districts, Tengritagh (Ch: 天山 *Tianshan*) and Sayabagh (Ch: 沙依巴克 *Shayibake*) Districts in the south of the city are Uyghur majority districts. I lived in Tengritagh District in the southeast (see Figure 1.8). Sayabagh is in the southwest of the city. Exact statistics of the ethnic composition of those districts compared to the northern districts are not available. The socio-spatial segregation of Xinjiang and Ürümchi reflects a profound divide in society that runs much deeper than simply material landscape.

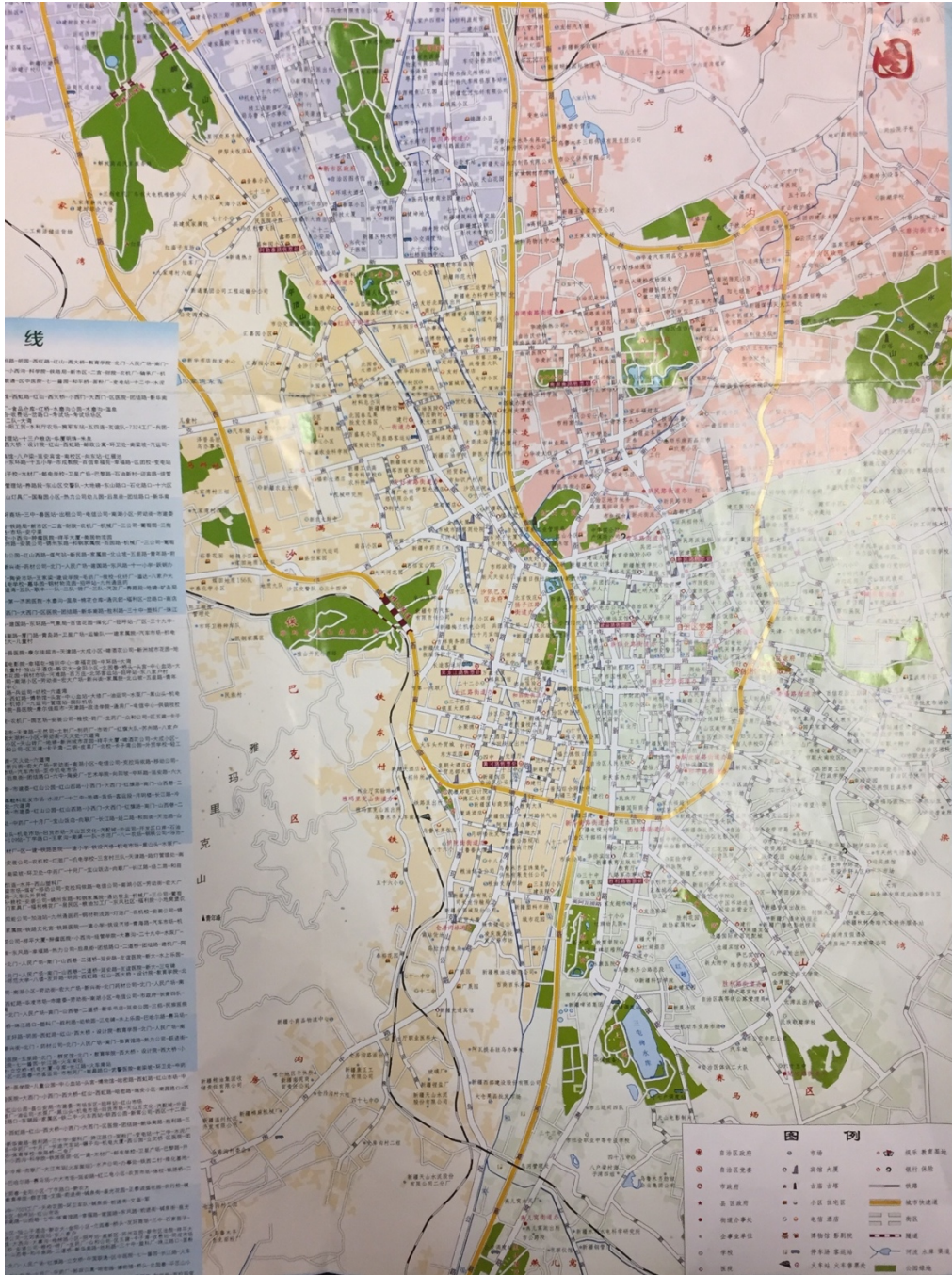


Figure 1.8: Map of Ürümchi. The orange-yellow area in the southwest is Sayabagh district and the green area in the southeast is Tengritagh district, the two districts in Ürümchi with the highest densities of Uyghurs. Tengritagh district is where I lived the entire time I lived in Ürümchi from 2014-2017. The pink and purple areas are the central downtown areas, distinguished by skyscraper office buildings and shopping centers. *Source:* Ürümchi City Map obtained by author in the field. Author of Map not listed.

B. Place Names

Another profound divide between the Uyghur and Han manifests in place names. Uyghurs used to call China “Kitay” and Chinese people “Kitayliq.” This is the same word people use in Russia and Central Asia. However, the word “Kitay” and its derivatives are now forbidden because Han people saw the term “Kitay” as derogatory (though it is not derogatory in Russia and Central Asia). In Xinjiang, I only heard that word in whispers and muffled between giggles because of its taboo status. Now, Uyghurs say and write, “Zhungo” for China, which is a transliteration of the Chinese word for China, “Zhongguo” (lit. Middle Kingdom) into the Uyghur alphabet. They say and write “Xenzu” in Uyghur when referring to Han (a transliteration of the Chinese “Hanzu”) people instead of “Kitayliq.”

Northern Xinjiang was traditionally Mongolian and Kazakh, and was known as “Dzungaria” at the time of the Qing conquest in 1759 (Millward 2007). The Uyghurs traditionally called their home in southern Xinjiang “Altisheher” (sometimes spelled “Altishahr”), which means “Six Cities.” Altisheher refers to the six oasis cities along the rim of the Taklamakan Desert, known as the Tarim Basin (see Figure 1.9). The six cities were the core of the traditional Uyghur homeland, which is today referred to as Southern Xinjiang (see Thum 2014). Historically, the Tarim Basin region was also known as “Kashgaria” in European documents. It is now forbidden to refer to that area as “Altisheher.” Uyghurs today use the word and spelling “Shinjang” to refer to Xinjiang and “Genubiy Shinjang” to refer to Southern Xinjiang. As Dautcher (2009, 55) writes, these naming systems and printed maps with those names “[encode] prescriptive models for the imagining of social and political landscapes” in Xinjiang. According to Dautcher (2009, 57), “maps become one of a larger set of elements...that permanently affect Uyghurs’ collective relationship with local place” and contribute to their desettlement from the land (see Chapter 6).



Figure 1.9: Map of the largest Tarim oasis states in the 1st Century BCE. The Six Cities of Altisheher are (1) Kashgar (Uy: *Qeshqer*, Ch: *Kashi*), (2) Yarkand (Uy: *Yeken*, Ch: *Yecheng*), (3) Khotan (Uy: *Xoten/Hotan*, Ch: *Hetian*), (4) Aksu (Uy: *Aqsu*, Ch: *Akesu*), (5) Kucha (Ch: *Kuche*), and (6) Kroran (Uy: *Korla*, Ch: *Kuerla*) (see Thum 2014).
 Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Xinjiang

Ürümchi, located in northern Xinjiang, is a Mongolian name that means “grassland.” In Chinese, Ürümchi is written as 乌鲁木齐 and pronounced “Wulumuqi” in standard Mandarin Chinese. In official English standard, Ürümchi is spelled “Urumqi,” to reflect the Chinese-influenced pinyin style of using the qi combination to make the “ch” sound. I use the word “Xinjiang” to refer to the region and the Uyghur spelling of the word as Ürümchi in this dissertation.

The names of the modern main streets in Ürümchi are also telling of CCP conquest. The two main streets in the Uyghur enclave of southern Ürümchi, built and named after the 1955 CCP takeover of Xinjiang, are Liberation Road (Jiefanglu) and Solidarity Road (Tuanjielu). These roads were a constant reminder of Chinese presence, and in terms of the word Liberation, a subtle and

implicit sense of indebtedness and gratitude. The main highway leading into Ürümchi was called “Welcome the Troops Road” (Yingbinlu). Other names of the main roads around Ürümchi were reminders of Chinese colonization as well, including Red Flag Road (Hongqilu), Friendship Road (Youhaolu), Fortune/Happiness Road (Xingfulu), and Victory Road (Shenglilu).²² It is common for streets in other cities in China to share these names.

IV. Social Context of Xinjiang and the Field Site

A. Thick Description of Ürümchi and Tengritagh District as Field Site: 2014-2016

Many Uyghurs often described to me their experiences living in Ürümchi as though they were living in two different worlds in the same city: A Chinese world, for them usually associated with work or school, and a Uyghur world, usually associated with family and friends. I experienced these two different worlds between my Han and Uyghur friends, one that was clearly and obviously marked through the use of two different time zones: Hans used Beijing time and Uyghurs used Ürümchi time, which is two hours behind Beijing time. I dressed differently, talked about different topics, and ate different food depending on my interaction with either Han or Uyghur friends. The crowds almost never mixed, mostly because the Uyghurs would eat strictly Halal and sometimes would stop eating if a Han entered the room. For Uyghurs, the mere mention of the word “pork” (*choshqa goshi*) was strictly avoided. Getting in a taxi was always a reminder of these strict divisions: First, one had to take a look at the face, clothes, and radio station before assessing the driver’s *minzu* and engaging in a “*nihao!*” or an “*essalammueleykum!*”²³ I misjudged the *minzu* of the taxi driver wrong more than once, only to be greeted with blank stares. Han drivers responded

²² Ch: 解放路, 团结路, 迎宾路, 红旗路, 友好路, 幸福路, 胜利路

²³ Meaning “peace be unto you” in Arabic, but a common greeting throughout the Muslim world.

to my “*essalammueleykum*” with a “Sorry, I don’t speak English,” suggesting that they could not even recognize the most common greeting in Uyghur and thought I was speaking English. Han drivers got lost in the winding alleys and one-way streets in the Uyghur neighborhoods.

One day, I went looking for yogurt in the morning and stepped into a convenience store in my Uyghur neighborhood. It was a Chinese shop that was blaring traditional Chinese opera with a high pitched voice and a sorrowful moaning of a stringed instrument in the background. I stood at the counter checking out when I saw rows and rows of alcohol and cigarettes lined up on the shelves across from me. I thought to myself, “And just like that, I’m transported back into China.” It looked and felt exactly like a shop I saw eight years ago in Nanjing. Then I stepped outside and saw Hui vendors selling Halal snacks, a Uyghur guy selling sunflower seeds with Turkish music blasting in the background, and groups of kids playing out in the street. “And just like that, I’m transported back to Uyghurland,” I thought. My respondents also jokingly referred to the northern, Han-majority parts of the city as “Zhungguo,” the Chinese word for “China.” The following vignette illustrates the mix between Han Chinese and Uyghur worlds the combined in the Uyghur neighborhood.

In May 2016, I went to get my watch fixed. I had seen a sign saying “watch repair”²⁴ in large Chinese characters in the window of the Arman supermarket across from the mosque. I assumed that it would be a Uyghur repair person because it was in the Arman, a grocery store owned and operated exclusively by Uyghurs. When I got there, I saw a man behind the watch repair desk selling cell phones. I greeted him in Uyghur and asked him about getting my watch fixed. He got up and took my watch, handing it to the Chinese lady sitting behind a tall desk, and, assuming that I didn’t speak Chinese, told her I wanted to get my watch fixed.

²⁴ Ch: 修表

She peered at me above her reading glasses. She said that I needed to replace two parts in the watch, one around 20 *kuai* and one around 30 *kuai*. She was short and to the point. I agreed and stood there waiting while she worked. As I waited, an elderly Uyghur man with a long and tangled beard, missing teeth and pungent body odor came in and asked to buy four watch batteries.

“That’ll be 10 *kuai*,” she said.

“Well, that’s just not okay!” He exclaimed. “That’s way too expensive,”²⁵ he said in a thick accent.

“Okay, fine. Eight *kuai*. That’s two *kuai* per battery,” the Han lady conceded, rolling her eyes.

“That’s not okay!” He exclaimed again. “*Bu xing!* I’m not paying more than four *kuai*,” he insisted.

She chuckled, clearly amused, and said, “Look, I’m already giving you a really cheap price.”

“Four *kuai*,” he kept insisting over and over again.

“Fine,” she finally said as she gave him the batteries. He had a triumphant smirk on his face before he hobbled out.

As I continued to wait, customers came and went, asking her questions as she worked on my watch. The man who had interpreted for me helped an old woman with her watch and several other people interpret their questions into Chinese. Each transaction involved some bargaining: the Uyghur person insisting that she lower the price, and the Han lady demanding higher prices. Eventually she finished my watch, and she said I owed her 110 *kuai* in total for the parts and labor. I was taken aback because I was expecting it to be 60 *kuai* at the most. I finally got her to lower it down to 100. I turned to the man selling the phones and asked him if he thought the price was fair.

²⁵ Ch: 不行! 太贵了!

He lifted his hands up in surrender and said to me, “No, that’s not my job. I don’t do that. I can just translate. I don’t take part in the bargaining process.” I resigned to handing over my 100 *kuai*.

Before she gave the watch back to me, she asked:

“Xinjiang time or Beijing time?”

Bargaining was a controversial subject among Uyghurs and Han people because Uyghurs considered bargaining to be a type of cheating, lying and stealing. Uyghurs often prided themselves on always giving the fair price, and accused Han people of being cheap people who would cheat every chance they could get. Nevertheless, their cheap services, such as repair shops, were needed in the neighborhood. The difference in time zones was also a signifier of separation between *minzu*, and Uyghur people who used Beijing time were often accused of or stereotyped as “*minkaohan*,”²⁶ a derogatory term used in colloquial Uyghur to describe Uyghurs who had gone to Chinese school and were considered more Chinese than Uyghur.

B. Thick Description of My Neighborhood in Tengritagh District: 2014-2016

The following is a thick description of my neighborhood (see Figure 1.10). The description is of a walk from my apartment to the Grand Bazaar, the “downtown” of the Uyghur Tengritagh district, which was about a 25-minute walk.

²⁶ Ch: 民考汉



Figure 1.10: Map of Tengritagh District where I lived in Ürümqi. *Source:* Map obtained by author during field work, no source listed on the map.

Teenagers suddenly surrounded me on the street, chatting in a mixture of Chinese and Uyghur. Boys and girls wore identical school uniforms: identical blue and white track suits with “No. 3 Urumqi City High School” printed in English on the back. The teenagers filled the

convenience stores, spending their pocket change on snacks and candy, and littering the row of grass and bushes next to the sidewalk with the wrappers.

A group of girls walked four abreast with their arms linked, bouncing along in counterfeit Nike high tops or brightly colorful Converse shoes. Their long hair was pulled into high ponytails that swayed back and forth to the rhythm of their gait. A pair of boys cursed loudly and laughed, swaggering, their hands in their pockets, yelling out to their friends, and dodging playful punches. One was smoking his cigarette expertly yet casually pinching it between his forefinger and middle finger. A group of three teenage boys swaggered casually, shoulders back yet relaxed, hands in their pockets, bodies swaying in a relaxed yet confident gait of aloofness. All three wore unlaced tan hiking Timberland boots. In their coolness, I saw only the cruel need to grow up faster than is age appropriate due to structural violence.

I passed a small pick-up truck filled with sheep awaiting their fate at the Halal butcher across the street. I was so used to the smell of sheep and animal carcasses hanging from huge hooks on the ceilings of stories and in markets that it didn't even bother me anymore. I passed a real estate office, a dry cleaner, a bank, a seamstress, a bakery, a vegetable shop, and a specialty import shop featuring local Uyghur brands, juice from Turkey, soda from Korea, and butter from Kazakhstan. Next-door was a jar-shaped, coal-fueled oven called a tandoori. A boy no older than 11, his baseball cap swung to the side, his face shiny with sweat, his apron caked with flour, his arms black with soot, bent over the tandoori oven to place the bread carefully to the sides. He stood up, and in a moment again bent over, bringing out steaming bread and placing it onto the counter window. My stomach rumbled as I smelled the garlic.

I greeted my neighbor on the next block. He was kicking around a soccer ball with his three-year old grandson. The grandson squealed with delight and turned to chase after it. He asked

when I could come over to help his granddaughter with English, and whether I am ever going to graduate and get married. I laughed and kept walking. A group of five boys about the same age in identical school uniforms walked by, one carrying a case of free milk given out at school on his head.

As I entered the Grand Bazaar, I walked down a street of over-priced restaurants for Han Chinese tourists. Young, skinny men wore pants hugging their legs and still sagging below their hips, a concave dent at their back pockets. They stood outside the front doors, stoking the smoldering coals of the *kawap* grills and hawking for clients, yelling out, *Jiger kawap! Leghmen! Polu!* (Liver kabob! Spaghetti! Rice Pilaf!) in an unending call to no one in particular. As I approached the center of the bazaar, the crowds thickened and the beggars increased. Advertisements on a recording loop amplified through megaphones announced cheap cell phone cards. Clothing shops sold soccer cleats and knockoff Manchester United soccer jerseys.

A policeman's eyes followed me as I walked by the police station, and I held my breath as a line of military police in camouflage fatigues passed me. They carried riot shields while following a man in a black police uniform with a blue armband reading "commander"²⁷ who spoke into a walkie-talkie. When they passed and took no notice of me, I breathed a sigh of relief and walked on.

As I passed through an alley that was bottlenecked due to limited space from the encroaching subway construction, the crowds thickened even more and I was squeezed and pushed around in the crowd. I held my purse even tighter and felt claustrophobic. There were street hawkers waving towels and aprons in my face, yelling out prices in an unending loop ("5 *koy* 5 *koy* 5 *koy*!") seemingly without even stopping to take a breath. Beggars cried out in tears and wails

²⁷ Ch: 指挥官 *zhihuiguan*

of pain and loss and struggle, their stumps for legs and their rashes and boils on display. When I reached the row of tents selling food, shoes, and jeans, I was tempted to look at the jeans someone is selling for 20 yuan and then I remembered that I can't fit into jeans for women here. My mouth watered at the sight of steaming sheep lungs and intestines (*opke-hesip*, one of my very favorite foods) or hard-boiled eggs with carrots and chickpeas. Someone called out to me, "It's Nazaket!" (a different white girl who used to live here). I told them I was not her, and the whole crowd burst into laughter. I moved on, watching as police officers chase away a banana vendor on the street.

When night fell on my street, a smoky flavor from roadside *kawap* grills filled the air. After the alleys turned dark, Uyghur men swaggered with the relaxation of alcohol, holding on to each other, and ducking into the many convenience stores that line the street for another beer and cigarettes. Despite their strict adherence to Halal diets and refusal to sell cigarettes and alcohol, in the evenings Uyghur men often drank and smoked (see also Dautcher 2009 for this loose interpretation of Islamic practice around smoking and drinking). As I walked down the sidewalk, I heard the sizzling of the frying pans from inside the restaurant kitchens. The lamps attached to the sidewalk *kawap* grills glowed brightly, and I stopped at one street food stand for a cup of chickpeas with cumin and shredded carrots. I was careful to eat them while standing next to the stand, remembering that it is rude to walk while eating here.

In the summer, store owners sat on tiny plastic stools on the sidewalk, their faces shiny with sweat from the day's work, relaxing in the cool breeze of the summer night. They cooled themselves with paper fans that the local gynecological hospital gives out for free, each side declaring 580 yuan painless sterilization surgery because "it takes care of the uterus, it doesn't hurt,

and of course one needs to love without worry.”²⁸ Radios blasted with Uyghur dance music, playful and energetic tunes of blasting trumpets and strumming dutar.

I passed a man sitting and relaxing over a balcony railing smoking while looking at an iPad. I saw a 10-year old boy riding on an electronic skateboards and a couple with their arms around each other. I passed a bakery full of cakes and cookies that tempted me. I walked past the fried chicken place called Ablek—the Uyghur branded Halal version of KFC—I passed a girl with a long over-sized black t-shirt that says “USA” and has the Puerto Rico flag on it. Two young Uyghur men walked past me, their arms draped around each other. When I got to the narrow part of the sidewalk I suddenly and unexpectedly came across another set of police officers, walking in the opposite direction from me, 12 of them in a single-file line, their leader holding a walkie-talkie. Because of their silence and their uniforms, their *minzu* was ambiguous. One can often only tell Han and Uyghurs apart by their accents/language and clothing. Another telling sign was if they had a mustache. Han men never grew mustaches. Uyghur men loved mustaches.

As I walked, I saw the red and blue lights of a black police van flashing across the street, and when I passed the police station, I saw two shields and two helmets resting against the side of the wall, and a police officer talking and laughing with a Uyghur man. I passed two drunk men arguing over something, three beer cans perched on the black fence. Then I passed a mustached man totally passed out on his back on the sidewalk, his huge belly protruding from under his orange polo shirt. I stared and when I looked up, I made eye contact with a young Uyghur boy who was watching me and chuckling. I smiled back.

Then I passed an intersection near my home. The policemen who usually sat in their van at that corner stood in two rows standing there on alert, but still talking and laughing with the doors

²⁸ Uy: *baliyatquni asraydu, aghritmaydu, elwette soygu ghem-endishisiz bolush kerek*

of the van still open. Nearby sat four men on the playground exercise equipment and smoking, and three women with headscarves stood nearby and chatted. Four kids were playing on the elliptical machines next to them. A man walked very briskly with eyebrows furrowed and mouth tight in a police uniform. I kept walking, and passed a young couple staring at the blue light of their phone screen that illuminated their face as they walk with their arms around each other in the dark. The rest of the street was deserted and pitch black.

C. Thick Description of My Neighborhood in Tengritagh District: 2017

The “Chinese People’s Manifesto”²⁹ song played non-stop in every store and every restaurant. The tune blasted from huge black stereo speakers at every bus stop and from megaphones at every police station. There was no escaping it, even when I went to the park. The song played on a repeating loop from little speakers tied to every other tree. The lyrics were sung by the “Multi-Minzu Children’s Choir”³⁰ in rapid, high-pitched tones that reminded me of Tweety Bird:

*Rich and powerful, democratic, civilized, harmonious, free, equal,
just, ruled by law, patriotic, dedicated to work, honest, friendly!
This is the epic of Eastern Civilization,
This is the manifesto of the Chinese person’s soul,
This is the first class we learn in school,
From the time we are small, we will remember this system of values!
Put her carved inscription in your brain;
Let her melt into the middle of your soul.*

²⁹ 《中国人的宣言》 View the official music video at:
https://www.iqiyi.com/w_19rv96iawt.html

³⁰ Socialist System Core Values Theme Song: Recruitment and Propaganda Campaign of the Central Civilization Office, Central People’s Broadcasting Station and Chinese Civilization Central Broadcasting Network, 2017

The sounds penetrated my ears. No matter what I did, I could not block the tune out. I rolled my eyes and sighed. Then I wanted to scream. Playing the “Chinese People’s Manifesto” song non-stop at every street corner and in every store was the latest in a series of policies that summer meant to indoctrinate people into the ideology of the Party.

Walking through my neighborhood, I saw a poster reading, among other messages, “Without the Communist Party, The New China Would Not Exist” (see Figure 1.11). Along with the song, propaganda signs like these covered every exposed surface possible.



Figure 1.11: Among other messages, this propaganda poster reads: “The Communist Party labors for the nationalities, the heart of the Communist Party has rescued China; They have provided the people the road of liberation; They are leading China toward radiance.” *Source:* Photo by author, April 2017.

Then, I heard them before I saw them, loud sirens blaring as though in emergency. The military brigade was going south on Solidarity Road: two Public Security white police cars, one camouflage van, one camo Hummer jeep, eight armed police tanks, two more camo vans, nine armed police white trucks, and two camo Hummer jeeps, all of them with their red and blue lights flashing and their sirens making an annoying cacophony of alarms crawling down the street at a snail's pace. Most people on the street did not even look up from their phones as it passed. Some looked on with no reaction, just staring. It was as if nobody even heard it. One mother said to her toddler in the stroller, "Look at all the pretty lights! Do you hear the sirens? Woo woo woo woo." After a couple minutes of the brigade, some shook their heads and clucked their tongues. One woman shook her head and laughed. One woman said under her breath with a sly smile, "Apparently they're being careful, aren't they?"³¹ Besides those two comments and the sirens, the street was completely silent. I kept walking toward home. The sirens were part of our everyday vocabulary of sounds.

A barbershop blasted a Uyghur radio station on its amplifier as men sit inside getting their faces shaved. The sounds combined with "The Chinese People's Manifesto" from the police station across the street in a cacophonous din. Each police station, located every 100 yards or so, had the same scrolling message on an electronic board at the top: "Social Stability, Long-Term Governance and Long-Time Peace."³²

I kept walking and every 50 meters I passed the entrance to a back alley that was blocked off with a large cement wall and barbed wire. Behind the walls were huge ghettos. In them, Uyghur

³¹ Uy: *Ular hemmisini bayqap qapti—deee?*

³² Ch: 社会稳定 长治久安

homes and families were closed in by fences. There was only one entrance and exit, which was guarded by security. The security check stations were similar to the turnstiles at a subway station that open when one scans their national ID card. There was another section where a long arm goes up and down to let cars through, as in a parking garage.

I walked past the walls every day and did not give them much thought. “We’re used to it,”³³ everyone agreed. Each wall had a different message painted in red Chinese characters. The Uyghur translation was also written in red, in smaller Arabic letters, above the Chinese characters. One read: “Stable Harmony is Fortune, Divisive Destruction is Disaster!” (see Figure 1.12).³⁴



Figure 1.12: Example of propaganda on a wall topped with barbed wire blocking the entrance to a residential alley. Its source is the neighborhood *shequ*. Source: Photo by author.

³³ Uy: *Konup kettuk*

³⁴ Ch: 和谐稳定是福，分裂破坏是祸！ Uy: *Inaqliq, muqimliq-amet, bolgunchilik, buzghunchilig-apet!*

Some also included pictures of Uyghur and Han people smiling together: A Han person bending over an open book, for example, pointing to it while two women with headscarves smile widely. The message read, “Speak of Solidarity, Study the Archetype, Be a Model of *Minzu* Solidarity”³⁵ and “Strengthen the Shared Construction of a Family Garden of *Minzu* Solidarity and Harmony.”³⁶ The trope of “*minzu* solidarity” is common in China. Bulag (2002) critiques the discourse of *minzu* solidarity as a contradictory trope of nation-building and a component of the state socialist project that produces coercive national unity and hegemonic devices of assimilation.

D. Conclusion

There are many images and stereotypes popularly associated with Xinjiang. There is the image of oppressed Xinjiang: military police, tanks, crying mothers, cultural genocide and repression. The impoverished Xinjiang is a desert wasteland full of poverty, thirst, dust storms, and heat. There is the stereotype from the Western and Chinese media of unrest in Xinjiang, a place full of terrorists, bombings, riots, and knife attacks. For some, especially tourists, there is the exotic Xinjiang, a land full of grapes, melons, fruit, dancers, beautiful women, camels, and music. There is historical Xinjiang, the Xinjiang of ancient Kings and Queens, the Silk Road, Buddhist caves, jade deposits, and oil fields. There is Transnational Xinjiang, for its Turkish, Persian, Arabic, Russian, and Chinese roots. People also think of Xinjiang as “Other”: full of Muslims, poverty, backwardness, of desolation, of oppression and racism and authoritarianism, of camels and donkeys, of underdevelopment. I aim to dispel some of these myths and exhibit that the complexity of the situation that cannot be reduced to one generalization, but is instead comprised of

³⁵ Ch: 讲团结 学典型 争当民族团结楷模

³⁶ Ch: 加强民族团结共建和谐家园

intertwined layers of politics, economics, and culture that formed a rich and diverse social life in an atmosphere of fear and control.

The politicized ethnic conflict in Xinjiang is similar to the situation directly to its south in Tibet, especially regarding the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) repressive and policed surveillance state highly focused on reducing religious practice and limiting contact with foreigners or foreign media. Makley (2018, 21), a Tibet expert, explains that the limitations and ideologies of a bounded nation-state remains an integral part of the everyday violence that harms minorities that resonates in the Xinjiang case as well: "Yet the routinization of state terror and impunity in times of crisis only brings to light what is in fact an everyday cultural politics of the nation-state." Ultimately, I find in Xinjiang that despite strong authoritarian control, spaces of autonomy where coercion does not touch continue to exist. State territorial control is a fractured social relationship.

INTERLUDE

July 2017: Today Erkin and I tried to figure out what to do with our friend's old computer, which our friend had left behind at my house before moving abroad.

"Uyghurs are kind of afraid to recycle computers right now, you know...because of the new policies," Erkin explained. He had approached two nearby electronic recycling shops owned by Uyghurs, and both of them just laughed in his face. Recycling a computer meant possible connection to its contents and arrest. Uyghur electronics recycling are sticking to TVs, microwaves, and radios these days.

"Will a Han be willing to recycle it?" I asked.

"Yeah, probably," he said. We went out again, but we couldn't find a Han-owned recycling shop because all of them in our neighborhood were Uyghur. We went back to my house and I suggested we just throw it out. Erkin turned toward me with anger in his eyes.

"You don't understand! They are ugly bad!³⁷ If you throw that computer out, it will bring trouble to all of us! They are evil, Sarah! They are evil and ferocious! You have no idea," Erkin screamed as he clutched his head. Erkin was adamant that throwing out a computer might lead to an arrest.

"We're not talking about normal people, this is not a normal situation. You've got to believe me. We have to destroy it so that no one will want to recycle it. Just trust me, you don't understand what they are capable of, what they can and will do if they find this computer and trace it back to me," Erkin said.

"Okay, okay, do whatever you want.³⁸ I just don't understand how this computer has anything to do with you," I said.

"Sarah!" he screamed in frustration. "Shit is crazy right now, they will do anything they want whether or not it makes sense." He insisted that we destroy it by breaking it into tiny fragments with a hammer and then scattering the pieces around to different trash cans in the city.

"I'm still here and breathing by some miracle, I don't know how, I'm just thankful I've made it this far. For these past two months, all I can think is, at least I'm still here. I'm still amazed I'm still here—not killed, arrested, or sent to re-education camp...yet. At least I'm still here. Okay, I'm still here, I'm still living, I'm still breathing. But I'm still waiting for the call or the knock on my door," he told me later that night, in whispers on my balcony.

³⁷ *Ular set yaman!*

³⁸ *Boldi, boldi. Ixtiyaringiz.*

CHAPTER 2:

METHODS: POSITIONALITY, SURVEILLANCE, AND INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

I. Positionality of an American Researcher in the Field

A. How and Why I Obtained Initial Interest in the Field Site

Many problematic colonial legacies are responsible for my initial interest in the topic of this dissertation. Though it is painful and embarrassing to admit it now, my attitudes before beginning graduate school towards Uyghurs as “helpless” and “exotic” were objectifying and exploitative. In order to begin to deconstruct my previous colonial attitudes and engage in co-production of knowledge with my research subjects while recognizing the incorrigible unequal power relations between us, I take a critical look at how and why I got interested in this topic and field site. That unequal relationship—as a white American studying Uyghurs—needs to be acknowledged right away.

“The Chinese took our jobs,” was a refrain I heard often from my friends’ parents growing up in a disenfranchised neighborhood in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Rusted and silent abandoned steel mills dotted the banks of the Monogahela River where I played daily with childhood friends. “If you can’t beat them, join them,” a high school geography teacher told us, encouraging us to learn Chinese in our spare time. “Learning Mandarin will be the most important skill of the 21st

century,” echoed in my ears from a young age. In the summer of 2009, I went to China for the first time on a 12-month language immersion program at Nanjing University.³⁹

On my first night in Nanjing, China in August 2009, a fellow American classmate, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, took myself and other classmates out to dinner at a Uyghur restaurant. He had been traveling in Xinjiang during the July 5th riots and told us how the police had forced him to delete his photos of the military crackdown that followed. Later, my host family warned me not to go to Xinjiang during school breaks. They told me, “That place is dangerous, full of Muslim terrorists who will stick you with a syringe full of HIV.” In September 2009, three Uyghurs were sentenced to 15 years in prison after being convicted of attacking people with syringes in Ürümqi (Wong and Ansfield 2009). Rumors abounded of terrorism connected to Uyghurs. I was skeptical about such a broad generalization of an entire group of people, and wanted to go there to see for myself. Our class trip to the region was cancelled because of the riots, and the region remained without Internet for almost a year.

Nonetheless, my interest was piqued, and I completed an undergraduate thesis on the Uyghur question in China-Turkey diplomatic relations. For the thesis, I conducted interviews with Uyghur activists, such as Nury Turkel, in the Washington, DC area. Hearing about their experiences as refugees in exile left a deep impression. For three years after that, people told me that doing research in Xinjiang was impossible and it would be better to stay in Nanjing where I already had extensive contacts. Thus, after graduating from college, I was a Fulbright scholar

³⁹ The program placed students with a host family, enforced a language pledge, and included 16 hours of language classes a week, plus field trips, activities such as Tai Chi and Kung Fu, and one-on-one tutors for two hours a week. My goal was to become fluent in Mandarin Chinese. I made an effort to make close Chinese friends and by the end of the program wrote a research paper in Chinese using interview data in Chinese. I was known in the program as “most improved” by starting with very little conversational skills to ending with fluency.

researching uneven housing development in Nanjing (Tynen 2018). However, I never stopped thinking about Xinjiang. The human rights violations, the challenge, the danger, and the risk appealed to me as a researcher and an academic.

B. How I Chose the Research Topic

I initially chose the research topic because Xinjiang and the Uyghurs are under-researched. I also wanted to learn a third language. I was willing to make the sacrifices necessary to take the time to learn Uyghur and start a whole new project for my PhD because I desired to be able to contribute to something that was under-studied and not well understood. I wanted to shed light on something that not many people know about. While my research on an under-studied area is important, my research is nevertheless laced with power relations of exploitation and self-interest—a desire to earn some acknowledgment or approval, and in the end, get a job out of it, which is a problematic relationship tainted with power and privilege.

In addition, the idea of safe versus dangerous places fascinated me. The idea of Xinjiang as a dangerous place enticed me from the very beginning, from the July riots to the “HIV syringes” in 2009. I wanted to understand why and how that place is thought of as dangerous, and how that affects the people who live there. I was fascinated with the definition of terrorism as, “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter,” and the way the status of state sovereignty often dictates these two definitions (Elden 2009).

In 2014, after securing a three-year NSF grant for a project titled, “Political Economy of Urban Real-Estate: Diversity in Chinese Cities,” I had the opportunity to go to Xinjiang and start the new research project. The idea was to expand my Master’s thesis work on uneven urban housing development to an ethnically heterogeneous city. With inspiration from my adviser John O’Loughlin’s (2010) work on ethnic conflict, my initial curiosity was: Why do the states hold on

to these rebellious territories so strongly—why not just let them have independence? And why do people die and kill for these territories? I hoped to get a new insight into some of old questions: What is a nation, and why do people construct it? Why do people challenge it and hold on to it so strongly? Is the nation-state all about modernity and capital accumulation and exploiting cheap labor, as some have suggested? Or is it about something else? Is it pride and greed, or fear? I was intrigued by a new language and a new alphabet, an oppressed and struggling people that might need my help, and a new place to explore: new food, music, customs, and histories. I wanted to go somewhere that other people did not dare to go, to go somewhere with a history of colonialism and violence that was unique and yet reflected in so many other parts of the world at the same time.

However, the topic of *minzu* relations and nationalism could be interpreted as too sensitive in questioning the territorial integrity of China. A project about urban development,⁴⁰ key buzzwords in Chinese and something the country is proud to show off to the world, would be more realistic and less sensitive. I soon learned that my initial white savior trope of human rights was nothing but a fantasy, and found myself helpless in the face of desperate people who wanted nothing more than to leave China, and saw me as their ticket out. For ethical and practical reasons, the dissertation project here is focused in two of the chapters on the effects of urban development on migration and social relations in the city (see Chapter 6 and 7). In the end, the everyday violence of the cultural politics of the nation-state are inevitably an important part of social relations in the city of Ürümchi that I could not, in the end, ignore, and also a major focus of two of the chapters in the dissertation (see Chapter 4 and 5).

C. How I Obtained Permission

⁴⁰ Ch: 城市发展 *chengshi fazhan*

In order to protect the identities of those involved, I must refrain from giving extensive details on the people who helped me obtain a student visa at that time.

The initial weeks were spent running back and forth between the increasingly higher-ranking hierarchical layers of the security apparatus: 1) *shequ*, 2) police station, and 3) Public Security Bureau. This process is explained below.

The *shequ* was located in one of the neighboring apartment buildings, where there were two housing units (more information on the *shequ* will be discussed in Chapter 4; this description provides important background for that chapter). One unit was on the second floor and one on the third floor (the bosses had their offices on the upper floor). The units had been converted into office space and devoted to the administrative and surveillance tasks of the *shequ*: One room was devoted to monitoring the CCTV camera footage of the *shequ*'s jurisdiction (approximately 8,000 square meters), which included about 100 cameras that one could remotely zoom in and move around that monitored every square foot that was not occupied by a building. Other rooms were offices, where workers, mostly young (under 30 years old) Uyghur women administered temporary residence permits for those who do not have local *hukou* (which included foreigners like myself), among other tasks. These other tasks included administering immunization programs, school registrations, passport applications, welfare and social security distribution, birth control distribution, and monitoring of family planning records. In another building immediately next door, two houses had been converted to the *shequ* security post, which consisted mostly of Uyghur men. The *shequ* police were responsible for 24-hour patrols and security checks throughout the *shequ* jurisdiction. The *shequ* "police officers" were technically not considered official "police" and had the status more of a security guard. They wore uniforms that said SWAT in English with the

Chinese translation “special police.”⁴¹ The “SWAT” were on the lowest strata of security personnel in the city. Most *shequ* had the two-office set-up with both administration and security, where the two offices are often separate but close by, built inside converted homes in an apartment building, with one side for administration and one side for security. With the help of my contacts, I got the signatures and stamps I needed for the next level.

Next, I needed to get a signature from the police station.⁴² I went to the police station every day, twice a day, for the next three days. On the second day, they said, “Come back in the afternoon.” “It’s already the afternoon,” I said. They laughed. “Come back tomorrow then.” The next day, they unlocked the doors to the stairwell and instructed me to climb to the third floor. “Just knock on room 301 and ask the boss to sign your letter,” they explained. The Han boss was inside a large office with a majestic oak desk, smoking and looking seriously at a piece of paper. “Excuse me,” I squeaked. “Sorry for the trouble, can you please sign this letter?” I attempted in my most professional Chinese voice. He looked at the letter for a long time. “Why are you living off campus?” he asked. “Well, I have health problems so I need a room with a kitchen,” I explained, my voice trembling. He paused for a moment, then bent over and signed and dated the letter without a word. I got his signature stamped on the second floor. Then, on the first floor, I was given the sought-after blue card, which read “Foreigner Temporary Living Registration Card.” This card also contained all my information—DOB, passport number, address, phone number—and more signatures and stamps. I could now get a physical—including blood and urine tests and a chest x-ray—and apply for my “Certificate of Health Examination” from the “Entry-Exit

⁴¹ Ch: 特警 *tejing*

⁴² Ch: 派出所 *paichusuo*

Inspection and Quarantine.” After that, I could apply for my residence permit at the Public Security Bureau. I repeated this entire process three times over the course of my fieldwork. Once in 2014, again in 2015 and again in 2016, each time getting new residence permits that were pasted in my passport and functioned as year-long visas.

D. How I Initially Approached Ürümchi as Field Site

At first, I was surprised by how little Chinese that Uyghurs spoke. I thought that Chinese would be more common and widespread, but many Uyghur people did not speak Chinese at all and Uyghur people who did speak Chinese were very reluctant to do so. It took about three months of full language immersion before I could start having full conversations in Uyghur, and after that it was much easier to make Uyghur friends. My Uyghur language skills seemed to show some loyalty to one side in a binary world.

For my research participants, I believe I was a strange figure: a grown, unmarried adult reaching her thirties coming to learn a new language for no plausible reason. “To do research,” I explained, but for them this held little tangible meaning. They might have placed me as a spy or a missionary or a journalist, or as a rich person playing on their trust, or perhaps a stupid person who couldn’t make it in their own country. In others’ views, I was a nice girl trying my best to learn a new language. For others, I was their ticket to freedom through study abroad by practicing English.

I was naïve to think that just because I had lived in China for two and a half years at that point, I was even somewhat prepared for life in Ürümchi. I was not. It was a completely different world from that I had experienced in Nanjing from the language, to the customs, to the lifestyle. During those first three months of getting my bearings and learning a new language, it felt in a visceral way that I had moved to another country. Xinjiang is a hybrid of two nations at the same time, akin to a colony. I was often shamed by friends for acting Han (blowing my nose or burping

at the table, for example), and one once admonished me, “If you’re going to learn our language, you’ve got to learn our customs. We are not Han and the sooner you learn that, the better.” My first three months in Ürümchi were especially emotionally and mentally challenging in ways that I had not expected. Now, when I think about the times I brought non-Halal food into the house, or blew my nose at the breakfast table, or walked around with a skirt and my legs uncovered, my face burns red with shame and I cringe as though someone just kicked me in the stomach. It did not matter that I was a foreigner. Uyghurs were horrified when I did something that a Han would do, like shake my hands after washing them. My first three months in Ürümchi were especially emotionally and mentally challenging in ways that I had not expected due to the culture shock of living in a Muslim and Turkic community for the first time.

One of the experiences I had with culture shock was intrusive questions about my religion, gender, sexuality, and marriage status. Like never before in my life, my gender was suddenly a cornerstone in every social interaction.

“The word ‘strong’ (*kuchluk*) is only used to describe men,” they corrected me.

“If only you wore make-up and got dressed up, you would be so much prettier!” they encouraged.

I tried. I wore earrings and scarves. Still the comments continued.

“But because you’re a girl, don’t walk around with your legs uncovered.”

I covered my legs with black tights underneath long, loose skirts. I covered my feelings for girls under words, switching out boyfriend when I meant girlfriend. I even grew my hair out to my shoulders for a time.

“You look exactly like a boy,” people giggled and echoed on an almost daily basis despite my efforts to fit in.

Another adjustment was fielding intrusive questions about my family's financial background and situation. Questions about finances are common in Han communities as well, but the Uyghur questioners in Xinjiang were more intense and aggressive than what I had experienced in Han regions. Perhaps I was also more self-conscious of my wealth and privilege in a region that was considerably more impoverished than eastern China. Here is an example vignette of a typical conversation that occurred between myself and others on a regular basis.

When I entered Guljennet's house, I unexpectedly found her grandfather sitting near the window and facing the door when I entered. He rose to greet me, and I automatically said, "*Olturung, olturung!*" telling him to sit out of habitual politeness.

"It's my house, I'll sit when I want to sit," he responded with a small smile, and I laughed in embarrassment, covering my face with my hands. It was not the first nor the last time I fumbled with proper etiquette: In this case, I was not to tell an older male what to do.

He was missing several teeth and his face was tan and deeply wrinkled. He wore a doppa, and sported a long white beard. Guljennet told me that he is over 80 years old. They invited me to sit and we chatted amicably about the weather.

After a long pause, the questions from *bowa* start rolling in. (*Bowa* means grandfather and is a polite address for old men.)

"How old are you? Are you married?" He shook his head in disappointment at my answer.

"What kind of food do you eat there?"

"Do you eat pork?"

"How much does meat cost?"

"What's the average salary in America?"

When I answered, they looked at me with wide eyes, speechless, their jaws hanging open, and their heads shaking in confusion and wonder and awe.

“How much do your parents make?”

“I don’t know. We don’t discuss such things with each other, this is a very private matter for us,” I said. *Bowa* and *Guljennet* slowly shook their heads back and forth, eyebrows furrowed. Everyone knows how much each member of their family makes.

“How much scholarship money do you get?”

“How much do you spend each month?”

At first, I experienced these as extremely intrusive questions on my personal life. The truth was that I was insecure because the question touched the core of my American privilege.

I avoided the question by saying my scholarship covers my living expenses. The questions did not cease, however.

“How much is your scholarship?”

I responded with “enough to live on” to try to avoid the subject, but they pressed me several more times, thinking that I didn’t understand their question. I told them, “I understand what you are asking, but we don’t talk about such things in my culture.” But they pressed me again, and I refused again. The truth is that my scholarship, which pays in American dollars, is a higher salary than they will ever dream of earning, and I did not dare reveal this.

They continued with their questions.

“What’s your rent?”

My initial negative reaction to their “intrusive” questions about money was rooted in my American privilege: Because my salary from my NSF graduate fellowship was many times more than most people earned. I felt defensive when people asked and if I did answer, I lied. Of course,

the narrative for myself is that I came from a working middle-class background and worked really hard all my life.

But the truth is that my American bank account—the one that lets me stretch the dollar up to six times more its value while I am in China—is the very core of the imperial privilege that the American dollar has built itself on through a legacy of genocide and colonialism. The US history of slavery and labor exploitation is exactly what has allowed Americans to set the standard of value of this piece of paper and say that it is worth six times more than the yuan.

It was not simply a just “cultural thing.” Yes, their questions were intrusive, but why? Why did I shrink from disclosing such information? Because it expose privilede built on vast differences in access to material resources, differences built on genocide, racism, and colonialism, a difference in access to resources that will shape the trajectory of mine and their entire lives. At first, the questions about my body—especially regarding gender and sexuality—bothered me. But it quickly became clear that women’s bodies were the last shred of control that many men felt they obtained in a world of shrinking cultural and political autonomy, and that the values of chastity from Islam were one way to maintain the boundaries of a community.

E. How I Experienced the Fieldwork

As much as I wanted to tell the story purely from my participants’ perspective, my subjectivity as a privileged, white, American woman shaped the story. My fractured, helpless, and privileged self is one part of the ethnographic narrative that should not be erased. The mixed feelings of a fractured self overwhelmed me at times: American privilege, a desire to help, homesickness, dating a Han woman, and academic goals to collect “data” inevitably comprised part of the story in these pages. I was both in and out of the queer closet. I enjoyed research in Xinjiang, but wanted to return to the United States. I felt chained, but I was also free as an

American passport holder. I was paranoid and afraid of surveillance, but also had incredible freedom to live in my own apartment and freely talked to friends about most topics. I also had the privilege of escaping in expensive coffee shops. I wanted to help, but knew I could not in any tangible or practical sense.

Because of my American passport and my native English speaking skills, Uyghurs desperately leeches onto me for some semblance of hope and freedom. People often asked for help in obtaining passage to the US. I drowned in sorrow in not giving that to them and felt desperately depressed because of my helplessness. The only thing I could do was just be present in the moment with them in their fear and pain, and nod helplessly listening to their desperation to leave China. All I could do was sit and hold their fear and pain for them for a few moments. I listened and I wrote down what they wanted me to write down. Writing down what I could was such a little thing to do and yet so much. At home in the evenings, exhausted from the day's events, I wrote down what I could between tears, and then listened to Uyghur radio and Uyghur books on tape until I fell asleep to drown out my fears and thoughts, trying to let go of the pain I witnessed that day. In the morning, I finished writing any additional notes or thoughts from the day before, and then turned to my Uyghur language study and began fieldwork in markets or homes all over again.

However, I wish I could have done more. I often escaped my depression through my own, selfish academic needs, goals and checklists by working on publications or starting my initial dissertation writing, sometimes telling people I was too busy to hang out. If I could go back in time, I would have spent even more time in the field listening to people's stories and less time behind my computer.

That is what the story on these pages includes: a push and pull tension between mixed feelings of a fractured experience: Through their stories and friendship, I eventually came to learn

what it is like to be Uyghur, but at the same time know nothing at all about it as a privileged American. I have a deep desire to accurately tell their story, but also want to keep them safe.

My positionality as a researcher means that I can never fully understand what it was like to be Uyghur because I had an American passport that could get me out and an American bank account that allowed me to escape with pleasure and consumerism that others did not have, and granted me special privileges. In my suffocation and escape both on micro and macro scales, I am able to understand this rocking and swaying boat of emotions and experiences that frustrated and caused resentment. There was fear in the unknowing, and fear in the feeling of constant surveillance, but also moments of freedom.

Although this dissertation is not about me, I did experience the suffocating and breathing feeling: There was oppression but there was also autonomy and agency, humanity, connections and help, and shared experience. There was numbing, getting used to it, not noticing, blocking it out, denial, circumventing the rules, and the normalization of the military police state. There was hope it would get better. Even in the midst of the crackdown of 2017, everyone kept saying, “It will get better” (*yaxshi bop ketidu*). But then it didn’t. It got worse. There was confusion, speculation and guessing. But in the midst of all of this, at its very core, was trauma. Trauma of breaking up homeland and separating families, trauma of loss and poverty, desperation and fear, and lack of basic human needs. I saw this trauma taken out on women and children who were beaten and who didn’t understand what was going on. This story is about the trauma of the state, but also of capitalism and patriarchy. This is the experimentation of legitimacy in an authoritarian state: How far will it go in disregarding humanity to maintain control?

II. Surveillance: Political Sensitivity, Digital Monitoring, and Precarious Research

Conditions

For most of my fieldwork my research participants and I had relative freedom to meet frequently in each other's homes and talk about most topics freely. I also had the freedom to have two different Uyghur roommates until summer of 2017, as well as the freedom to travel around Xinjiang to Sanji, Kashgar, Xoten, Yeken, Qaghiliq, Aqsu, and Ghulja. I also had the freedom to attend parties, weddings, and celebrate holidays at friends' homes, and to host them for frequent visits for tea, meal, or sleepovers at my own home. However, beginning in mid-2016 with the appointment of a new Party Secretary of Xinjiang, Chen Quanguo, many new rules and regulations were introduced that targeted the behaviors and activities of the Uyghur population. For example, all non-Chinese phone apps (no matter how innocuous) were banned to facilitate surveillance of digital communication, and public displays of piety (fasting, wearing head scarves, praying or having a beard) resulted in arrest and detention. As described in Chapter 1, alongside new police stations on each street corner and a daily parade of military convoys through the streets of Ürümqi, mandatory checks of residents' phones and computers became routine.

A. Confusion, Fear, and the Power of Digital State Surveillance

By 2017, the rumor mill warned that people could be arrested for the social media content on their phones, but the arrests appeared random, causing uncertainty and confusion among my friends and research participants (see Dautcher 2009 and Chapter 4 on the social utility and criminality of rumors). Police patrolling or stationed on sidewalks at 500 meter intervals would ask for the phone's password and connect it via USB to a portable device that scanned the contents. My contacts spoke of friends and family who were arrested for content that was sometimes over four years old: a picture of a mosque shared on social media in 2013, a WeChat group message where one person said "Thanks be to God," or a text sent in 2015 about celebrating Ramadan. According to the administrators at the university where I was affiliated, who also conducted

frequent electronic scans of their students' phones, the police were looking for files of terrorist videos published by ISIS. However, rumors spread that any type of religious content, such as the presence of keywords such as "God" (*xuda*) or "Essalamueleykum" could get one thrown in jail.

A document of unknown origin containing a list of forbidden words and images circulated on social media (see Figure 2.1). The list included words like "Allah" and "Ramadan fasting."

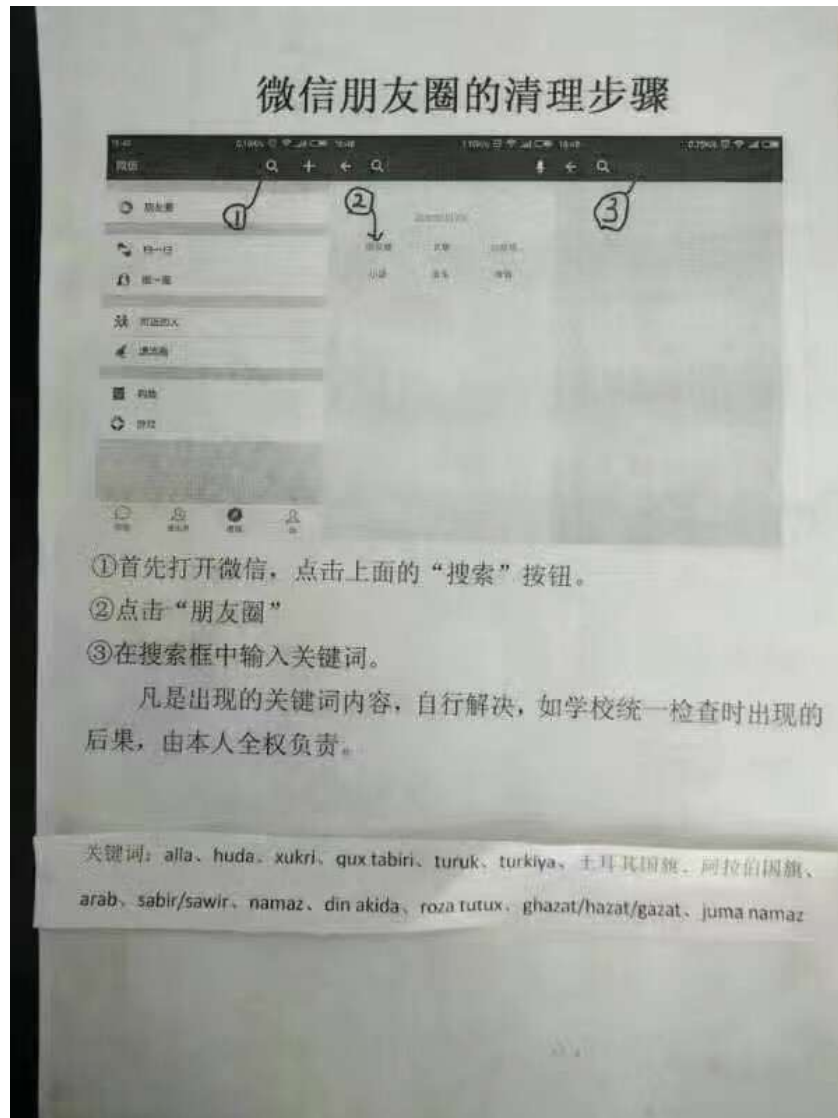


Figure 2.1: A poster titled “Procedures to Clean Up WeChat.” A Uyghur friend sent me this photo in March 2017 with the message, “Please pay attention to this and don’t send me messages with these words.” The diagram explains how to delete one’s chat and social media history. The message below reads, “If it is discovered that you have a keyword in your content, you’ll be held responsible. If the school system check discovers one of these keywords, you will bear the responsibility. Forbidden words are listed in Uyghur and Chinese, and I provide the English translation here: *alla* (Allah), *huda* (God), *xukri* (Thanks be to God), *qux tabiri* (dream interpretation), *turuk* (Turk), *turkiya* (Turkey), 土耳其国旗 (Turkish flag), 阿拉伯国旗 (Arab flag), *arab* (Arab), *sabir/sawir* (patience), *namaz* (prayer), *din akida* (faith in religion), *roza tutux* (Ramadan fasting), *ghazat/hazat/gazat* (jihad), *juma namaz* (Friday prayer).” Source: Downloaded from WeChat by author in March 2017.

While the phone surveillance exhibited that everyone could be watched at all times, fear was fueled through the uncertainty surrounding what specific content was forbidden. Nobody trusted that the list was comprehensive, and rumors abounded about the tiny infractions on phones that led people to jail.

In addition to religious content, rumors spread in Spring of 2017 that contact with foreigners could land Uyghurs in jail. The definition of “contact” extended not just to in-person contact, but also contact over social media. After 18 months of fieldwork over three years, mid-2017 marked the first time that my Uyghur research participants—by this time close friends—began deleting me from their social media platforms. Deleting someone from apps that provide instant messaging software usually means cutting off ties completely. After all, people were also scared to call me on the phone.

In early 2017, my Uyghur roommate at the time, Aynur, and a mutual Uyghur friend, Reyhangul, both females in their late twenties, had the following interaction in my living room. Reyhangul said:

I’m just so afraid of the police these days. Seriously, I’ve just been so careful not to make any mistakes.⁴³ I’ve been completely washing a lot of people from my WeChat. To tell you the truth, I deleted all of my foreign friends. They have been really strict about monitoring phones recently. I really want to go abroad eventually and the *shequ* is holding my passport for “safekeeping.”⁴⁴ I don’t want to do anything that would jeopardize my ability to get my passport back and go abroad. (2017 conversation)

⁴³ *Xata qilish*, or other forms of the verb meaning “to make a mistake” was used by Uyghur government authorities to describe marks against you that could determine your standing with a points system. You could be deducted points based on actions and that was used as a rating system to determine whether or not you could obtain permission to go abroad or likelihood of being put into a re-education camp.

⁴⁴ Security checks and surveillance of phone content work alongside other forms of sovereign power and control, such as holding people’s passports, requiring residence and traveling permits, and police and military patrols of homes and streets became commonplace that year.

Aynur then conducted a search for the word “Allah” on her WeChat Moments news feed and, looking over her shoulder, I saw that a long list of posts came up. “Look, even my older sister who is a police officer apparently has written ‘Allah’ in some of her posts,” Aynur said. She sifted through the people, deleting some of her WeChat contacts who had posts with the word “Allah” in them. I wondered out loud whether the rumors were false. Reyhangul jumped in, “No, it’s real. They’re checking all the phones on my campus.” Reyhangul then told us several stories of others who had been punished, including a friend who had her phone turned off by the authorities.

Some were scared of maintaining electronic contact with foreigners, and confused about what was content was legal and illegal. As Aynur noted, even police officers seemed to be uninformed about the new rules. Before 2016, people were relatively free to post apolitical religious content on social media, so it is not surprising that even police officers would have had words like “Allah” on their social media at the time. The irregularities of how the law was applied illustrates the constant change and confusion during this time.

After this conversation, I was concerned that being WeChat friends with Reyhangul and Aynur would bring them danger since rumors abounded that any foreign contacts put people on a watch list as a suspected terrorist. Each of them separately assured me that it was no problem as long as I was in Xinjiang because I was using a local IP address and phone number. That was their reasoning and I do not know if they were correct in that assumption or not. Certainly some level of surveillance could have detected I was a foreigner because I used my passport to buy the phone. However, Reyhangul and Aynur were more concerned about religious content and thought they could outsmart the authorities regarding my identity. Reyhangul changed the spelling of my name in her WeChat from the English to the Uyghur alphabet in case her phone was checked. “If they think you’re Uyghur, they won’t even bother checking the messages. I think it’s fine. You’re still

here [in Xinjiang], so I'm not going to delete you," she said. Despite her assurances, digital surveillance raised ethical questions for me as a researcher, especially in terms of the unknown permissibility of Uyghurs having foreign WeChat contacts. Clearly the authorities had a way of tracking my interactions and knowing that I was a foreigner. I was torn by how to negotiate my usage of WeChat with my research participants. In the end, I chose to continue using WeChat, but many of my contacts deleted me. By Summer 2017, I had already conducted all of my interviews with Uyghurs and was mostly meeting with Han people for interviews due to the heavy security state presence and fear in the atmosphere.

About one month after the conversation quoted above, Reyhangul seemed to change her mind and sent me a message on WeChat saying, "My friends are telling me that we can't have foreigners on WeChat, so I'm going to delete you. It's nothing personal, we can contact each other by phone, okay?" Reyhangul called me a few times shortly after that, but then we stopped speaking altogether. In another example from June 2017, I was sitting with some close family friends when an older woman I did not know asked me for my phone number, saying her daughter and me would get along well. However, Muqeddes shook her head and warned her,

Sarah is good. But to tell you the truth, with the circumstances (*weziyet*) the way that they are, you have to be really careful interacting with and being friends with foreigners. I have to admit that I'm scared (*qorqimen*). You can't just run around being friends with foreigners without thinking about the consequences. So I would be careful if I were you. It's okay to meet, but don't call them on the phone. (2017 conversation in fieldnotes)

Many of my other Uyghur friends said they would delete me from WeChat, but they all had different strategies to stay in touch. Some said we could not meet in person, but could talk on the phone or on WeChat; others did not want to talk by phone, but were willing to meet in person. While some did not want to talk on WeChat, they were comfortable with SMS texting or calling. Some preferred to keep my contact information in their WeChat, but they did not want to use it to

send messages. Others were okay with messages as long as they were infrequent and short. State power operates in a closed context through fear and uncertainty. Everyone was kept ignorant about what was permissible and not, and that fueled fear and self-disciplining. But, the different strategies my contacts adopted to stay in touch with me also depicts how people draw on their own logics and flows of information to make choices about their risk and vulnerability in the face of state violence.

These strategies to avoid arrest or detection were accompanied by strategies to circumvent the rules. Take for example the following field notes and conversation with Aynur two nights before I left Xinjiang for the United States. Aynur was one of my interviewees, but also a former roommate, tutor, and research assistant of mine. She took considerable risk in coming to see me in person. I had not seen Aynur in three months. When she finally showed up around 11 pm, she looked like a stranger to me. Her face was blank, her shoulders tense, but she plastered on a fake smile. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to ask her why she was so busy, why she had disappeared. Finally, I said, "You can delete me [from WeChat] if you want." Aynur said, "I already deleted you." I hadn't realized because we had stopped talking. "I'm sorry. And I'm sorry I couldn't see you recently. We will see each other again someday. I don't know when. Someday. I promise," Aynur said. Shortly after, Aynur said it was time to say goodbye, and she asked me to meet her outside of the bar. I thought of the different files she had on there at one point, including the PDF of English books I had given her and the translation materials she had helped me with. "Maybe you should get a new computer," I suggested feebly. She nodded. "Maybe." She hugged me, turned, and walked away. I have not heard from her since. I went back into the bar, and explaining to our mutual Uyghur friends why I was crying, I said, "I just realized, if she got a new computer they would just question, 'Why did you get a new computer?' and she could still get in

trouble. So there's nothing we can do." One Uyghur friend said, "Exactly. There's nothing we can do (*amal yoq*). If they want to sentence her, they will find a reason. So actually, there's nothing to be worried about. Because there's really nothing we can do." Anything having to do with English language materials and research with a foreigner could be suspect. State power influenced everyday decisions, where separation of people from their most intimate relationships is the ultimate expression of state power.

I have no way to contact most of my Uyghur friends anymore. They did their best to circumvent the regulations, but once I left the country, it became very hard for Uyghurs to contact me because of my foreign IP address. Any contact with foreigners is held as suspected ISIS activity. Some still remained my WeChat friend and sent me messages occasionally. However, most of them are urban residents, while poor, rural migrants are subject to more surveillance than wealthier or more educated Uyghurs. Meanwhile, my Han friends still contact me without hesitation.

There is no doubt that conducting fieldwork in authoritarian political contexts requires special considerations (Koch 2013). For example, research participants may exaggerate or self-censor. My interviews are supplemented with textual analysis and participant observation to garner the most complete picture possible. The participant observation required mutual trust and genuine relationships with people, and extra precautions when talking on the phone or sitting in a public place. Furthermore, extra precautions must be taken to protect informants.

B. Ethical Research Practices

Keeping my informants safe is my first priority. While I continue to wrestle with the ethical balance between the two extremes of exploitation and paternalism, I have taken certain precautions to ensure that I am allowing the research participants to contribute to my research in ways that they wish to do so, while not putting them in danger. For example, I avoided talking about sensitive

topics with my research participants, especially when I first met someone. However, while I did not encourage political conversations, after establishing a close relationship with someone, I did not necessarily ask such trusted informants to change the subject if they felt they needed to talk about it (and some find a foreigner to be a trusted confidante). My research participants worked under informed verbal consent that I was writing a doctoral dissertation about how people in Ürümchi experience everyday life under the changing forces of urban development, especially neighborhood life, migration, and culture. Ethical practices are considered carefully and debated within my ethical compass every single day in and outside of the field. Each situation must be considered within its own context. I employ common sense when protecting myself and my research participants. The research ethics of privacy and confidentiality govern how I conducted research in order to protect my informants to the best of my ability. In doing so, there are certain guidelines and rules that I follow as outlined below.

In conducting ethical research there were three main principles that guided my everyday decisions in the field: 1) Data do not exist out there in the world to be extracted from research subjects—rather, fieldwork is about human-to-human connection in sharing our worlds with each other, 2) Establishing trust and informed consent with research participants is an utmost priority, 3) Collaboration in interpreting data and publishing is necessary for the most complete, ethical, and accurate picture possible. For more information on my data management practices, such as how exactly I ensured the confidentiality and privacy of the data—both with data management (encrypted files on an encrypted computer) and with publishing (aggregated data, changing information so as to disguise the informant, pseudonyms)—please see my approved IRB research protocol #16-0115. In conclusion, research ethics must strike a balance between keeping people safe while pursuing necessary research in an authoritarian political context. This balance is a

careful dance that involves genuine human connections and relationships, building of mutual trust and confidence, avoidance of overtly sensitive topics, collaboration in interpretation and publication, and careful data management practices.

III. Interview and Field Note Taking Methodology

I am always an outsider in the Uyghur community. However, through long-term engagement in the field, trusting and intimate relationships with Uyghurs, proficient Uyghur language skills, and often mistaken for a Uyghur during interactions with Han people and the police, I have experienced a *taste* of Uyghur life in Ürümqi. Still, holding an American passport and maintaining an American bank account with dollars provided privilege beyond what most Uyghurs I interacted with in Xinjiang could imagine. As such, I do not claim to speak for the Uyghurs. Instead, I present my interpretation of a small subset of data collected through interviews and observations inevitably colored by my own theoretical lenses, biases, and experiences.

A. Learning Uyghur

I decided before I moved to Xinjiang in August 2014 that I wanted to take the time to become fluent in Uyghur. Living with a Uyghur roommate for the first four months only further solidified this desire. Her family often came to visit and stay with us in our one-bedroom apartment. I wanted to be able to understand what was going on and communicate with them. I also found that people were friendlier and nicer to me when I attempted to speak Uyghur. For the first month living in Ürümqi in 2014, I had no choice but to speak Chinese with most people, including my roommate, her family, the police, the *shequ* employees, restaurant and store employees, even though where I was living in Tengritagh District all of these people were Uyghur. But after learning the alphabet and the basics through my own self-study of textbooks, flashcards, a one-on-one professional language tutor, and 15 hours a week of Uyghur as a Second Language classes at the

local college, I was able to start communicating in Uyghur. I started with numbers, basic items, and directions or addresses. Beginning in October 2014, I made a rule for myself to only spoke in Uyghur with Uyghurs. Needless to say, this caused endless frustration for my roommate, because I insisted on speaking Uyghur with her even though my Chinese was much better. This often meant pretending that I did not speak Chinese. If a Uyghur spoke to me in Chinese, I said to them in Uyghur, “I don’t speak Chinese, can you repeat that in Uyghur?” This forced both of us to proceed, however laboriously, into a conversation with broken Uyghur that improved day by day. One exception to this rule during that time in 2014 was with a few Uyghurs I knew who spoke fluent English. They very generously offered to practice Uyghur with me in exchange for English language practice too, but on nights we hung out eating or dancing, we would sometimes switch to English. However, it was an unspoken rule, for myself and others, that we never switched to Chinese. By the end of the semester in 2014, I was able to have simple conversations in Uyghur about past, present, and future things that were happening in daily life, and able to conduct business transactions and direct taxi drivers to my home in Uyghur.

In 2015 and again in 2016, I conducted two self-imposed “language pledges,” where I only spoke, listened to, read or wrote in Uyghur for six weeks (I did not speak to my family in the US during this time). I could understand the TV and radio, could read simple short stories, write short essays, and could hold conversations on most topics related to daily life with ease. Still, it was tempting to switch into Chinese or English with people when I was struggling, and I wanted to force myself to improve my language skills. By isolating myself from human relationships unless they were conducted in Uyghur, I was able to become quite proficient in the language. The only exception was the four days a week I went into the north side of town to coach an exercise class in Chinese. The language pledges included working on translating a Uyghur novel, watching

Uyghur TV shows online, listening to Uyghur radio for several hours a day, and hanging out with Uyghur friends patient enough to listen to my accent. The language pledges were instrumental in making the leap into thinking in Uyghur, which was a key part of becoming proficient enough to conduct interviews and research in the language.

The language pledges were of course aided by 15 hours a week of formal language instruction for 2 semesters at the local college, weekly 2-hour sessions with a professional Uyghur as a Second Language tutor with a degree in linguistics, and studying flashcards, writing essays, and translating documents. With these full immersion experiences, I was able to learn Uyghur fluently despite its status as a relatively difficult language for an English speaker to learn. By 2016, I highly enjoyed the suffixes and cases and verb forms, which made meanings very clear, and often found myself inserting Uyghurisms into my English language speech. By the end of 2016, I could speak Uyghur quite fluently. This meant that I could understand the radio and TV shows with ease to the point where they were actually quite funny and entertaining for me, hold conversations about most normal, daily topics with ease, and conducted interviews and translated recorded transcripts with full confidence. As 2016 and 2017 progressed, my language continued to improve in comprehension ability and communication.

B. Methodological Details for Participant Observation

The primary mode of investigation used was ethnographic participant-observation over the course of living in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, China for a total of 24 months from 2014-2017. I first arrived in Ürümqi in June 2014 already fluent in Mandarin Chinese, and I spent nine months from 2014-2015 learning Uyghur in the field learning Uyghur. I integrated myself into Uyghur society and culture, lived with Uyghur roommates, conducted a pilot survey about life in the city with rural migrants (a great opportunity to practice my conversation and interviewing skills before

beginning formal fieldwork), wrote field notes, and explored the city. I was proficient in Uyghur by the time formal fieldwork for my dissertation began in April 2016.

During my formal dissertation fieldwork time from 2016-2017, I cultivated existing friendships from the previous nine months of preliminary fieldwork, and reached out to new networks of people from different social circles and socioeconomic backgrounds (more details on that below). I lived in the Uyghur enclave of southern Ürümchi, and lived my daily life primarily amongst and with Uyghurs. From 2014-2017, I also spent two to four nights a week in the Han Chinese section north of the city volunteer coaching exercise to students of multiple nationalities and backgrounds, though a majority of my students were Han Chinese. I also had friends of other ethnicities, especially Hui, but chose not to include them in my formal study because of their different historical experiences within the Chinese state and Han ethno-linguistic community, and therefore their experiences are too different to account for in an account of Han and Uyghurs.

Participant observation was an inescapable part of my everyday life. Additionally, I also regularly conducted participant observation in a focused, sustained fashion. I went to a certain place with the sole purpose of doing observation, collecting as many sensory and kinetic details as I can, focusing my mind in a meditative fashion on what I was seeing, feeling, hearing, and smelling. Then I revisited that site regularly on a weekly basis. I kept a weekly schedule of my focused field work sites and restaurants so I made sure to obtain regular, consistent contact with a diverse number of places and the people who work in those places. See Table 2.1 below of a list of participant observation methods and the data derived from these methods.

Table 2.1. Purpose and Data Collected from Participant Observation

Participant Observation Activities	Data Derived from Participant Observation
Attending meetings or gatherings with informants (e.g., dinners, parties)	Everyday discourses of cultural difference, social stratification (e.g., dating and marriage taboos), and everyday life (e.g., “I can never get used to Ürümchi, but I don’t want to go back to my hometown either”).
Transect walking	Visible aspects of the built environment that constitute a unique cultural landscape, interaction of Han and Uyghur cultural forms in the landscape, business practices, and security presence.
Accompanying vendors or residents in their daily routines	Everyday business practices in inter- and intra-ethnic interactions (e.g., bargaining), the appropriation of space and transformation of landscapes through cultural signs and physical transformation of space (e.g., fruit and vegetable markets, hotels, mosques), and how cultural and business practices reflect socioeconomic groupings in housing, school, and businesses.
Visiting markets, restaurants, and parks	Everyday spatial practices and transformation of the landscape through the appropriation of space through business practices, language choice, fashion, or other cultural expression (e.g., playing instruments, dancing, picnicking)

I stayed mindful and observant of everything that was happening around me, especially eliciting the five senses and noticing as much as I could about my own positionality as well as my own feelings in the field. I kept a list of field note jottings in my phone notebook, usually words or phrases that jogged my memory about things I found interesting, important, contradictory, or confusing. The most important part of the fieldwork process was, I believe, the writing down of field notes. I discovered very well for myself that waiting until the next day is a very poor way to write field notes, so I always took time each day to write down as much as I could remember before I went to sleep.

The following process of writing field notes was developed from *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Second Edition by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011). First, I looked at my field note jottings and wrote a list of bullet points of important stories or events that happened and a brief one-line summary of what happened. This list of topics from the day served as an anchor for the

writing of the day's notes. Then I free-wrote, trying to get as much down on paper as quickly as possible in rich sensory and kinetic detail. I avoided including any judgments or personal opinions or thoughts in the field notes, writing down only what I observed. I inserted a comment in the margins if I felt I need to make an interpretive note about what I thought, such as "he seemed angry," "I was confused about this," or "this is important because it relates to XYZ theme." I used the guidelines for writing description from Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011), trying not to tell what I inferred, but rather showing what happened through immediate and specific sensory detail of actions and imagery ("show, don't tell," they wisely urge): using concrete sensory details; paying attention to scenes, settings, objects, people, appearances, and action; using descriptive adverbs and adjectives, including: color, size, shape, sound, volume and smell; as well as noting kinetic imagery such as gestures, movements, postures, and facial expressions. These ranged from descriptions of a setting, social situation, appearance, or daily routines while avoiding inferences, stereotypes or evaluative judgments.

In Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (2011), they devote a chapter to the errors and messiness of interpreting members' meanings in the writing of field notes. They warn against "imposing exogenous meanings" of Western social theory, and point out the ways in which researchers ignore or marginalize local interpretations and understandings. In writing my field notes, I took careful consideration to these differences, as these are dynamics affected by my theoretical framework, my positionality in the field as a white, female American researcher, and my field site as one of considerable ethnic interaction and social negotiation within considerable government surveillance.

After I finished writing, I re-read my notes, filled in any missing detail, and inserted comments in the margins about thoughts or concerns about the notes. Then I wrote a one or two paragraph summary about my thoughts from the day, asking myself the following questions: What

did I learn today? What was particularly interesting or significant? What was confusing or uncertain? Did something happen today that was similar or different from things I previously observed? (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011, 83). At the end of each week, I read over all my notes a second time and wrote down or added any comments or thoughts. I approached my notes as if written by a stranger so that I can fill in or point out any confusing or missing details. At the end of each month, I spent one day coding my notes using the coding process described in a later section.

C. Methodological Details for Interviewees with Uyghur Participants

Beginning in June 2016, I began to conduct formal, semi-structured interviews with many, but not all, of my closer contacts. There were some cases, such as with friends who worked in government or security, where it was not appropriate to ask for a formal interview. By the end of my fieldwork in October 2017, I had conducted 46 interviews with Uyghur residents of Ürümqi (37 females and 9 males) aged 18-67, with 38 of the 46 people between the ages of 18-35 years. Two of the interviews with men were conducted by a male research assistant. After that my research assistant felt nervous, and decided it was not super safe for him to be conducting interviews and backed out of the project, though he remained a close friend, language tutor, and provided translation assistance. Besides those two interviews, the interviews were conducted by myself (no interpreters or other people were present for the interviews) with the help of NSF funding for compensation with cash, gifts, and treating people to meals or beverages. The remaining seven male research participants were unmarried and were familiar friends, or at least friends of friends, and the interview was conducted in a public place (e.g., park, coffee shop, restaurant), which allowed for mutual ease and comfort.

All of the interviews except for one with a fluent English speaker were conducted in Uyghur. As with many of my deeper and more engaged conversations in Uyghur during daily life, this occasionally involved asking the speaker to slow down or repeat themselves, or a pause so that I could check my dictionary, but otherwise the interviews were conducted with ease in Uyghur. As time went on, I became more and more fluent in Uyghur, especially when it came to my interview questions, and I was able to conduct the interviews with complete ease by 2017. I conducted 20 Uyghur interviews in 2016 and 26 Uyghur interviews in 2017.

The interviews with women were conducted in their home, at my home, and in parks or restaurants. Because the interviews did not cover politically sensitive topics, in 2016 people were relatively at ease with the interview and some allowed me to record and often invited me into their homes, or eagerly spent time in my home. However, in all cases it was obvious that people were holding back in their honesty at least to a certain extent during the formal interview. In 2017, people were much more careful and quicker to suggest a park or noisy restaurant or bar to talk in. The interviews with men were conducted in restaurants, parks, or coffee shops.

All of the interviews were conducted in the city of Ürümchi. Of the 46 Uyghur interviewees, five identified as locals from Ürümchi (*Ürümchilik*), and 41 identified as being from places outside of Ürümchi. Of those 41, the time spent living in Ürümchi ranged from 40 years to 3 months. 20 of the interviewees, including those who were born in Ürümchi, had lived in Ürümchi for more than 10 years. Of the 46 Uyghurs interviewed, 21 had urban household registration cards (*hukou/nopus*). Except for the five individuals from Ürümchi, the remaining 16 with urban *hukou* had *hukou* that were not from Ürümchi, but from other urban areas in Xinjiang (e.g., Hotan, Kashgar, Ghulja). The remaining 25 had rural *hukou*. Three of the 25 with rural *hukou* had spent most of their lives in the city, but the remaining 22 had grown up in the countryside at least until

they turned 18 years old, a majority coming from Southern Xinjiang (e.g., Kashgar, Hotan, and Aksu), though a few came from Eastern Xinjiang or Northern Xinjiang (e.g., Ghulja, Turpan, and Qumul).

Table 2.2 Demographics of Uyghur Interviewees, n=46

Category	Number of Uyghur interviewees	Notes
Born in Xinjiang	46	
Born in Ürümqi	5	
Born outside of Ürümqi in Xinjiang	41	15 of those 41 had lived in Ürümqi for more than 10 years
Urban hukou holders	21	Of those 21, 16 were non-local urban hukou from other cities in Xinjiang or China
Rural hukou holders	25	

Of the 46, 21 were renters, 18 were homeowners or lived in their family’s home that was owned, and 7 lived in the college or university dorms. Of the 46 Uyghur interviewees, I had known eight of them since 2014, five since 2015, 16 since 2016, and 14 of them I met in 2017. I had known many of the interviewees for at least a couple of years before I conducted the interviews to allow for mutual trust. The detailed vignettes I provide are all from people I saw at least once a week and had known for many years—these relationships were built on trust and frequent interaction, not just random people I found on the street and only met with once.

Of the 46 interviewees, 17 of them I met through a mutual friend or from another interview participant (i.e. snowball sampling with multiple starting points—some of them I met through the

gym, some of them I met through other international students or scholars, some of them I met through other mutual friends or classmates, some of them I met at local bars). The remaining 29 interviewees were unrelated to one another, and were people I met on my own through random chance encounters on the street, bus, restaurants, library, coffee shop or other public place where people would usually approach me in curiosity after hearing me speak Uyghur, or seeing me reading a book in Uyghur or otherwise studying Uyghur. Some of my research participants were also language exchange partners, where we would make time to teach other our respective languages, or practice spoken language with each other.

The interviews with Uyghurs usually took place over the course of at least three meetings to allow for a gradual build-up of mutual trust, to keep things casual, and to allow for spontaneous conversations to arise. While I asked everyone the same questions (see Appendix A for the list interview questions, which were translated from English into Uyghur with the help of a research assistant), these meetings were conducted in a conversational format that allowed for diversion and insights into other aspects of their lives that were not necessarily covered by the interviews. Often these meetings sparked a friendship, and we would meet a dozen or more times after the interview was completed. Of the 46 participants, I met with 18 of them at least six additional times after the formal interview was completed. With their informed consent through proper IRB protocol, some of the conversations that are quoted in this paper are taken from informal conversations that took place after the interview was conducted and were not related to the interview questions. I had thousands of other informal conversations with Uyghurs throughout my day and in my daily life—such as with neighbors, taxi drivers, and restaurant owners—that informed my research and insight into life in the city, but they are not quoted here unless they first gave informed consent. In addition to the 46 Uyghurs with whom I conducted the semi-structured

interviews, I had informal conversations with 52 additional Uyghurs. These interactions sometimes involved close friendships, multiple meetings and gatherings, but did not include a formal, one-on-one sit down, interview. Those 52 Uyghurs gave informed consent to quote them. Although the total sample size for my Uyghur data is 98 participants, when comparing *formal coding of interview data*, I only use the 46 participants who I collected complete demographic data on in order to provide comparison between rural and urban and other factors (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3. Total Number of Uyghur Research Participants by Type, n=98

Category of Uyghur research participants	Total Number, n=98	Notes
Completed formal interview	46	Of those 46, 18 agreed to meet for extended participant observation, which meant following them around during their daily life, over the course of at least six additional times.
Informal interviews	52	

All people quoted or referenced in this document are aggregates of multiple people where key identifying information has been changed. If demographic information is given, it has been changed from the original source and/or aggregated together with multiple participants. Furthermore, some information has been withheld as I felt it was too sensitive or dangerous to include even with the anonymity disguises.

D. Methodological Details for Interviews with Han Participants

I felt significantly more comfortable and at ease interviewing Han people. The interviews with Han people did not necessarily involve three meetings—some of the interviews were

conducted in one meeting with people I had just met, but it was obvious that they were more forthright and honest in their answers. The Han people were also very willing to introduce me to more people to interview without me even having to ask.

Han people were often very enthusiastic about the interviews, and usually let me record them on my iPhone. Most of the interviews lasted between 1-3 hours. I was also more fluent and comfortable speaking in Chinese when compared to Uyghur. The Han people always appeared completely at ease and appeared to speaking honestly and were forthcoming with their opinions and life experiences. They also seemed to understand the consent process and didn't have any problem with it. Some talked openly and in detail about issues related to ethnic relations.

I conducted 45 interviews with Han residents of Ürümchi (27 females and 17 males) aged 18-57, with 35 of the 45 participants between the ages of 18-35. All of the interviews were conducted by myself without a research assistant in Mandarin Chinese.⁴⁵ Han Chinese do not have taboos that are as strong as Uyghurs around meeting with females, so it was easier for me to meet with male Han participants. I conducted five Han interviews in 2016 and 40 interviews were conducted in 2017.

⁴⁵ Han people in Xinjiang generally speak standard Mandarin. Being a melting pot of more recent “immigrants,” Han people in Xinjiang generally speak standard Mandarin that serves as a common language among new arrivals, at least more so than one would find in Guangzhou or Sichuan, where stronger tendencies to speak local dialects prevails. Three of the research participants who had more recently moved to Xinjiang from Sichuan had language variations that were slightly more difficult to understand, but otherwise the interviews were conducted with considerable ease.

Table 2.4: Demographics of Han Interviewees, n=45

Category	Number of Han interviewees	Notes
Born in Xinjiang	29	
Born outside of Xinjiang and migrated to Ürümchi after school	16	
Born in Ürümchi	16	
Born outside of Ürümchi in Xinjiang	13	Of those 13, 6 were from a military agricultural farm (<i>bingtuan</i>)
Migrated to Ürümchi after school	29	Time spent in Ürümchi ranged from 39 years to 3 months.
Grew up in Xinjiang but spent >6 months in the inner provinces and then moved back	19	
Urban hukou holders	27	Of those 27, 15 were local Ürümchi hukou. The rest were urban hukou from other cities in Xinjiang or China
Rural hukou holders	18	

Of the 45 Han interviewees, 16 identified as locals from Ürümchi, though 14 of the 16 noted that their parents were from elsewhere and their hometown, or “*laojia*,” was located elsewhere in inner-China, but nevertheless they identified as being “Xinjiangren from Ürümchi” or “Xinjiangren born in Ürümchi.” 13 identified themselves as coming from elsewhere in Xinjiang, with 6 of those 13 from Xinjiang having grown up on a *bingtuan*. Six of the Han interviewees grew up on *bingtuan* farms, which are colonial military agricultural cities in Xinjiang. *Bingtuan* is a Chinese abbreviation for the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps, an economic and paramilitary organization with administrative authority over several medium-sized cities as well as settlements and farms in Xinjiang. That is important because *bingtuan* are entirely isolated from the Uyghur population and are very similar to cities in the rest of China. In other cities in Xinjiang, Han people have at least some contact with Muslim ethnic minorities. But for people who grew up on *bingtuan* farms, often their first contact with Uyghur or other ethnic minorities did not occur until they moved to Ürümchi later in life.

The remaining 16 Han interviewees were from other provinces in China. Of the 29 who were not from Ürümchi, the time spent living in Ürümchi ranged from 39 years to 3 months. Of the 45 Han interviewed, 27 had urban hukou and 18 had rural hukou. Of the 45 interviewees, 22 were homeowners, 10 were renters, 9 lived on their work site, and 4 lived in the college or university dorms.

Of the 45 Han interviewees, I had known four of them since 2014, one since 2015, nine since 2016, and 31 of them I met in 2017. Of the 45 interviewees, 34 of them I met through snowball sampling with multiple starting points—from the gym where I volunteer coached, classmates and campus, mutual friends, bars, as well as more traditional snowball sampling where I asked people for potentially interested participants after the interview was completed. The

remaining 11 interviewees were random chance encounters on the street or other public places with people unrelated to other people in the sample.

Most of the Han interviews took place over just one meeting (instead of three, which I found was necessary with Uyghurs) usually lasting 1-2 hours, more often followed a script, were more often recorded and transcribed, and less frequently resulted in a friendship or additional conversations after the interview. Although I did follow a fairly structured format where I asked the attached list of question in order, I asked a lot of follow-up questions, and it felt more like a conversation than an interview. They were just generally more at ease with the entire concept of an interview, so for them it seemed like not a big deal and they were willing to do an interview and never see me again. This was very different from my Uyghur contacts, who both wanted to build a trustful friendship with me first and were also eager to maintain a friendship and contact with me afterwards. Uyghur contacts were more eager to have the social status of a foreign friend, wanted English language practice and exposure, and were more eager to go abroad someday and hoped I could help them do that. However, the interview content also seemed more honest and forthright, and usually did not need a follow-up interview. I asked Uyghurs and Han identical questions as translated in their respective languages. Of the 45 participants, I met with 16 of them at least six additional times after the formal interview was completed (these additional meetings occurred at a bar, or before or after martial arts training, or during dinners or social events with the martial arts club that allowed for conversation and observation of daily life but not private conversation). In addition to the 45 Han who I conducted formal interviews with, I had informal conversations with 21 additional Han who gave informed consent to quote them (see Table 2.5).

Table 2.5. Total Number of Han Research Participants by Type, n=66

Category of Han research participants	Total number, n=66	
Completed formal interview	45	Of those 45, 16 agreed to meet for extended participant observation, which meant following them around during their daily life, over the course of at least six additional times
Informal interviews	21	

E. Conclusion

In ethnographic research, the researcher’s position in relation to the interlocuters or participants of the study is paramount. My position as a white, American female affects my experiences in the field, which invariably affects my data collection and my interpretation of those data. My position as a white American also provides context for the topics I hold interest in, which ultimately affects how I approach the project and the questions that I ask: Human rights violations motivated this project in the beginning. Later, I learned that such thinking is part of a white savior trope that is an ethnocentric way to think about the world and to think about other people. It starts from the assumption that one holds a superior position, rather than recognizing that power imbalance as a result of material inequalities of colonial legacies. My initial thinking and approach to the topic highlights the privilege and power I hold over my research participants from the beginning. I must acknowledge this problematic relationship with my research site and the people who live there, an unequal relationship that inevitably permeates some aspects. In order to address these concerns, I move away from colonial legacies of objectification and begin with the grounded,

inductive exploration of “Tell me what you think is important” when talking to research participants.

To claim to speak for the “oppressed” and “silenced” while benefitting socially and economically by obtaining a PhD degree from their words is problematic. The relationship between the researcher and subject can be highly exploitative because I am benefitting greatly in using their words in my publications that will benefit me materially and socially in inequitable ways for the rest of my life. The problematic relationship between researcher and subject is not one of equals, but one of power and privilege.

The subject of my investigation is not to uncover hidden “facts,” or to paint the “true” picture of life in Ürümqi (Geertz 1973). Rather than make claims about the city or a certain population as a whole, the goal was to explore how a small number of diverse people experience their lives and talk about their lives in order to focus on how people experience power relations in their everyday lives in the city. State bureaucracy and security surveillance was part of everyday life for myself and my local and migrant research participants. Thus, it became feasible to gather the data through participant observation, interviews, and textual analysis of the publicly and readily available everyday sources of radio, television, advertisements, newspapers, and propaganda.

INTERLUDE

June 2017: Around 5:30 pm, I made my way down the street and walked past the tonur oven that usually churns out bagels (*girde*), but sat quiet and empty today. Next to it rested five middle-aged women in a half circle facing the street. Some were sitting on the concrete steps that led to the mini-strip of convenience stores, butchers, and restaurants. Some were standing and leaning against the walls of the shop next door. Next to them rested two plastic bags on the raised concrete sidewalk, one full of mangoes and one full of *samsa*. I wondered if they are waiting to break their Ramadan fast.

I kept walking, and saw a man yell at another for blocking the sidewalk with his motorbike. Two boys around eight-years-old passed me in soccer cleats, counterfeit Adidas pants, and soccer jerseys arm-in-arm eating popsicles. Two boys about 14-years-old, their heads shaved except for a flop of hair on top brushed to the side that reminds me a little too much of my own haircut, wearing Adidas shoes, skinny black pants, and small striped polo shirts, shared a cigarette while they waited at the bus stop, flopped their bangs to one side, and looked at the large screens of their smart phones.

I passed a stairwell which had colorful counterfeit Nike and Adidas shoes tied to the stairwell banister. “I need new tennis shoes,” I thought, “Meh, I’ll buy them later, I don’t want to carry them around with me all day,” but another thought crossed my mind: “Who knows how long this shop is going to be around—it could be shut down, or go bankrupt, or the owner could be kicked out of Ürümchi tomorrow.” So I turned around and went into the shop.

I tried on a couple pairs of shoes, finally deciding on a pair of rip-off Nikes that the woman sitting next to me was also trying on and describing as, “super comfortable!” (*set rehet*)

“Is that *akash* over there a foreigner?” the girl accompanying her mom said. *Akash* means older brother.

“That’s not an *akash*, my child, that’s an *achash*.” *Achash* means older sister.

“*Akash!*” the little girl insisted.

“No, it’s *achash*. You see, she’s wearing earrings.”

I laughed.

I asked how much the shoes were. A boy about 10-years-old was sitting behind the front desk doing his math homework in a Chinese textbook.

“80 koy,” the shop owner replied.

“Ok, I see on the sign over there that it says that the prices given are reasonable, and don’t bargain, so I won’t bargain with you over this,” I said.

“This is a really cheap price. If you go to the Chinese markets or those kinds of stores, they’ll sell this same shoe to you for 120 kuai. But here we want to establish a loyal customer base and hope that you will come back here next time when you want to buy shoes, knowing that you’ll always find the cheapest shoes here,” she said.

I told her that I will come back.

“So I guess you can read Uyghur, huh?” she asked. The sign about no bargaining that I had read was written only in Uyghur.

“Yes.”

“Are you American?”

“I am.”

“My son [points to the boy doing his homework behind the desk] says he wants to go to America.”

The boy hid his face in his hands.

“Oh, that’s nice,” I managed to sputter.

“Yes, he wants to work and study hard so he can go to America.”

He continued to hide his face, but peeked out from behind the sign he is hiding behind to catch a look at me. His mom gave me a look, pleading with me to say something.

“If you work hard, you will have more opportunities,” I finally managed. “Your summer vacation is coming up soon, right? Work hard on your exams, and you’ll be able to rest starting in July,” I tried to encourage him.

I tried to swallow the pit in my stomach that started to form as a rush of thoughts flood my mind—in a system where, for Uyghurs, learning Chinese is valued above English, in a system where he is fighting the wind blowing against him in the wrong direction, in a system where the yuan is 6.5 times less than the dollar, does he even have any hope of obtaining a passport let alone acceptance in an American university let alone able to afford the tuition? Do I want to perpetuate the idea that if you work hard, anything is possible?

I smiled again, wished him health, and ducked out the door, knowing that his mother’s shoe shop might not exist tomorrow.

CHAPTER 3

THEORY: ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE STATE, FEMINIST GEOPOLITICS, AND SETTLER COLONIALISM

I. Theory

A. The State Effect: Uneven and Fractured State Power

While the Chinese state maintains a significant presence in people's lives in Ürümchi, I also emphasize the gaps in space and time of that presence. I notice a fracturing of state power that may seem counter-intuitive in an authoritarian context. Few would disagree that state power of any kind is fractured at some level, and my goal is not to prove the state power is fractured. Rather, I use ethnographic research as the best way to understand how state power is both repressive and uneven, as well as ideological and material, in working at the level of the neighborhood and body. I shed light on how state power functions as fractured in bureaucracy and bodies in a particular ethnic context at a specific site and time. Specifically, I look at the *effects* of state power, especially how the multiplicity and complexity of state power is experienced when it comes to people's daily tasks.

In the following paragraphs, I explain the debate between ideological and material state power to introduce the vocabulary to explain how people in Ürümchi experience uneven state power and how state power affects people's lives, especially at the scale of the body, household, market, and neighborhood.

Social science scholars have countered the misconception of the state as a unified entity by emphasizing that the state is a multiplicity of disjointed actors and often incongruous institutions (e.g., Althusser 2006 [1970]; Abrams 2006 [1988]). However, Mitchell (1999) argues against Abrams's (1988) argument that the "state-system," or the multiplicity of government institutions, and the "state-idea," or the appearance of a monolithic entity, should be thought of as separate. Instead, Mitchell reasons that the abstract and ideological forms of the state cannot be separated from the everyday practices that produce it and make the state a reality in people's lives: "The phenomenon we name 'the state' arises from techniques that enable mundane material practices to take on the appearance of an abstract, nonmaterial form" (Mitchell 1999, 77). For example, going to the DMV to renew a driver's license involves waiting in line and filling out forms, a mundane and material practice, a space where we physically encounter the state. The driver's license renewal is required by the thing we call the "state." The state finds its presence in our life through its rule-making and our rule-following. If we do not comply, we can get fined if caught. While it is true that citizens experience state power in the mundane, material aspects of bureaucracy, citizens comply because of the ideology of the state as an abstract entity that can enforce or control our actions through laws, surveillance and punishment of its citizens within a circumscribed territory.

Mitchell (1999, 77) writes that we should not simply ignore or reject the common misconception of a reified state by using the words "political system" instead of the word "state." Instead, he advocates for analyzing the state as crucially both ideological and material, as both "illusory" and "real" (Mitchell 1999, 76). The elusiveness of defining where the state begins and ends becomes precisely the inquiry of interest (Mitchell 1991). For example, the police in Ürümchi are important, but certainly not a coherent entity, instead divided into multiple branches. There are

security guards, *shequ* police, city police, the PRC police, and military police.⁴⁶ These different iterations of the police are prevalent in the citizens' everyday life, and make their presence known on the streets. However, they report to different branches of the government, wear different uniforms, and perform different duties. Some police officers of the various forms are Uyghur and some are Han. It is the way that the police are hard to define and the way that they are both ideological and material, and both part of and separate from state power that is the object of inquiry. The anthropology of policing is also a valuable body of literature that examines the local and specific articulations of policing not as a reified entity but fragmented (Martin 2018a). In my field site, policing and bureaucracy worked together in the *shequ* to maintain neighborhood surveillance.

Similar to the police force, the state also has many branches that illustrate fracture rather than coherence. When it comes to the “state,” the story of uneven, fractured and segmented power affects people's lives in even more nefarious ways than the more visible policing. In terms of gaining a residence permit, the segmentation of the state turns a mundane and simple task into a barrier to access the city: there are the neighborhood resident committees, the police station, and the Public Security Bureau.⁴⁷ Even within the *shequ* there are multiple branches: the hygiene branch, the police branch, the resident committee branch, the Party branch, and the fruit and vegetable markets. There were many government branches, from the prosecutor's office to the public health bureau, to the city's water and electricity bureaus, not to mention public institutions from schools to publishing houses. One of the key observations of state theory literature is to emphasize that the state is not separate from society, but instead that state and society are

⁴⁶ In Chinese, respectively: 保安, 特警, 警察, 民警, 武警, or *bao'an*, *tejing*, *jingcha*, *minjing*, and *wujing*.

⁴⁷ In Chinese, respectively: 社区, 派出所, 公安局

fundamentally intertwined in the material and ideological spheres (e.g., Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005). Specifically, “one must examine the orderings of the world it produces; the types of institutions, knowledges, norms, and practices that issue from it; the manner in which these institutions, knowledges, norms, and practices structure the *quotidien*” (Mbembe 1992, 4). While Mbembe draws on particularities of a postcolonial state in a certain African context, there are helpful connections and applicable ideas to my study in Ürümchi because my study is also looking at the intersections of the everyday, bureaucratic practices of the state, culture, and the banality of state power.

The disaggregated Chinese state is not a unified and coherent entity as the reified imaginary of the word “state” suggests, but rather disorganized, multiple, fragmented, and chaotic. Nevertheless, the state is present in material ways: police stations and paperwork, for example. The state’s presence is felt and experienced, such as in the embodied ways it controls family planning. In taking into account these observations and building on Mitchell (1991, 1999), rather than either try to define the state, an impossible task, or do away with the state as an object of inquiry altogether, I investigate the ways that the state is hard to define and bound by using ethnography to examine what people say and do and how that affects and is affected by the presence of state power.

Mitchell (1999) describes the multiple and fractured state as the “state effect” in the following: “The state is an object of analysis that appears to exist simultaneously as material force and as ideological construct. It seems both real and illusory” (76). The paradox of the state as both very tangible, but at the same time clearly ephemeral relates to what I observed in Xinjiang. My observations resonate with what Hansen and Stepputat (2001) refer to as the “ambiguities of the state,” where the state is “both illusory as well as a set of concrete institutions; as both distant and

impersonal ideas as well as localized and personified institutions; as both violent and destructive as well as benevolent and productive” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 5). In Ürümchi, the state is experienced as both close and distant, as caring and inclusive, as well as arbitrary and violent.

B. Fragmented Authoritarianism

Within the police state with heavy control in everyday life from family planning to residency permits to education, I found that state presence was fragmented. For example, people used connections, such as friends and family who worked at the *shequ* or in the police, to help them navigate the system, get paperwork pushed through, or circumvent the rules. Strong state presence and fragmentation are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Lieberthal and Lampton (1992) theorized a concept called a model of “fragmented authoritarianism.” They use the model to describe dimensions of decentralization in post-Mao China. During the post-Mao transition, lower-level officials were granted more economic decision-making power. Specifically, Lieberthal and Lampton (1992) focus on the structural distribution of resources and dissemination of authority from the central to local governments. Their model concerns the economic decision-making of bureaucratic interactions among civil servants and local officials. Under the “fragmented authoritarianism” model, bureaucratic bargaining over resources means that no single body has authority over the others. They conclude that China’s central power is weaker than has been previously assumed, but that local governments are more powerful than was thought.

While Lieberthal and Lampton (1992) provide important background information into how the meso-level and upper-level bureaucracies function especially when it comes to the distribution of economic resources across the many iterations of the central and local governments, my study gives a grounded picture to complement their model. In my work, I use “fragmented authoritarianism” as an analytic to understand the ways that citizens experience state power on the

ground: 1) First as fragmented: the state was described as irrational and chaotic, which they saw as a troublesome nuisance to be ignored and avoided at every opportunity. 2) Second as authoritarian: scary, powerful, and violent on the other hand, where surveillance meant that they had to be careful about every move they made and word they said.

While my study does not include interviews with officials, it instead provides an ethnography of everyday life. My study adds rich detail to Lieberthal and Lampton's (1992) formal study of political hierarchy by looking at how policies are implemented and how people feel about such policies. I found in Ürümchi that there is chaos and confusion that allows for the limitation of citizen freedoms. Lieberthal and Lampton (1992) find that the central government is not all-powerful by any means and describe the ways that lower-level officials jockey for resources. In other words, decision-making is not all top-down. In Ürümchi, people encounter and navigate the state especially through the bureaucratic surveillance and police system, where they find loopholes in the system. In Lieberthal and Lampton's (1992) model, no single body has authority over the others. I argue that when such policies are implemented into the neighborhood's and people's lives, no single body has authority over the others: though the state is scarily powerful, people also experience it as chaotic and irrational to the point that they can move around it and avoid it the best they can.

C. Ethnography of State Power

Scholars have written about the value of using ethnography to uncover the multiple fragmentations and disaggregated nature of the state as a multiplicity of actors across space (e.g., Ferguson and Gupta 2002). For example, the state is cultural and discursive, as well as material: "reconceptualizing states consists of seeing them as culturally embedded and discursively constructed ensembles...produced through everyday practices and encounters" (Sharma and

Gupta 2006, 27). The state shapes everyday practices, such as through requiring ID cards. Everyday practices also constitute the state (Das and Poole 2004). Ethnography is a useful tool for understanding the constitution of the state: “To study the state...from ‘the field’ in the sense of localized ethnographic sites, [shows that] whether ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ of the evanescent boundary between society and the state, that [boundary] usually crumbles when subjected to empirical scrutiny” (Hansen and Stepputat 2001, 5). While the state and society may appear separate, they are actually mutually constitutive and intertwined. For example, the community centers (*shequ*) of urban China permeate everyday life through the bureaucratic regulations that restrict residency and mobility, as well as home inspections.

In my observations I noticed that in addition to the police stations and military patrols, the confusion of the paperwork that was required to register for legal residency in the city was also a more nefarious and hidden—though still material—way that the state maintained control. I find that ethnography is one of the best ways to study these more invisible, nefarious, banal, mundane, and ordinary forms of state power because I recorded daily aspects of life that go unnoticed by most people (Das 2007; Li 2007; Reeves et al. 2014). Through ethnography, I found a system of registration, paperwork, and surveillance that laid the groundwork for the interment. I specifically analyze the points of encounter between state and citizen as not clean cut but messy, overlapping and complex. My project observes the encounters, analyze the effects, and emphasizes the importance of those effects as situated in a particular context, the micro-scale bounds of my field site.

Many others have described the importance of ethnographic research on the micro-scale forms of individual experiences of the state as crucial (Megoran 2006): “Anthropologists show how different desires, hopes, and fears shape the experience of the biopolitical state” (Das and

Poole 2004, 30). Sharma and Gupta (2006) highlight the ways that ethnography is particularly useful in uncovering generalizations and assumptions by illuminating unevenness across space and time: Ethnography is an “attempt to make anthropological sense of ‘the state’ and the nature of rule in a (neo)liberalizing, transnational world” (Sharma and Gupta 2006, 5). Ethnography can assist in connecting multiple scales from the body to the state and more. Hansen and Stepputat (2001, 37) remind us of the importance of challenging theory from the ground up:

The study of localized political struggles, of the functioning of local institutions of governance...should caution us when it comes to drawing conclusions regarding the uniformity of how...stateness [is] spoken, understood, and converted into policy and authority. If subjected to an ethnographic gaze, a strict Foucauldian view of modern governance...tends to crumble.

In Ürümchi, everyday encounters navigate through rules and regulations as best they could, and still connect with their ethno-religious and cultural identity in whatever ways they could despite state restrictions. Krohn-Hansen and Nustad (2005) show through the ethnographies in their edited volume: 1) the spatialization of the state, especially the production of boundaries, and 2) the identification of legible subjects within those boundaries used to regulate the population. In building on this vocabulary, I found a combination of the spatialization of the state through red tape and policing in enforcing state power in the neighborhood, household, market, and body. Since in the Uyghur context, we witness the combination of state power enacting power and experienced in uneven ways, it makes sense to turn to scholarship on the ethnography of state bureaucracy.

D. Ethnography of Bureaucracy

In the literature on ethnography of state power, bureaucracy is a key theme because it is the main way that people come to encounter state power and interact with the materiality of state power (Graeber 2015). Bureaucracy remains a visible (through paperwork) and invisible (through structural violence) form of control (Hull 2012a). In drawing on my observations of the way that

the state produces administrative and bureaucratic practices that structure everyday life in Ürümchi, I turn to Mbembe's (1992) analysis of the banality of power. Mbembe (1992, 2) argues that we must pay attention to the minute details of state power as an assemblage, where "state power *creates*, through its administrative and bureaucratic practices, a world of meanings all of its own, a mastercode which [aims] for a primary centrality" (emphasis in original). State power shapes everyday practices, including those practices developed to ignore or navigate confusing state policies. I find that the red tape and policing or surveillance of *shequ* function together and are one of the main ways that people come to know and fear the state. Consistent with Ferguson and Gupta (2002), perceptions of state space are produced through routine bureaucratic practices. However, in diverging from Ferguson and Gupta's (2002) finding about how grassroots politics are starting to question state power, I find that the ideals of grassroots politics in the *shequ* in China are largely ignored, and that the primary outcome is fear and violence rather than citizen empowerment.

Sharma and Gupta (2006, 11-12) write about how ethnographic perspectives on bureaucracy illustrate how the state operates and how the people see the state: "Mundane bureaucratic procedures thus provide important clues to understanding the micropolitics of state work, how state authority and government operate in people's daily lives, and how the state comes to be imagined, encountered, and reimagined by the population." In tying together what I wrote about in the section above with Mitchell (1999), Sharma and Gupta (2006, 17) also write about the ways that ethnography and a study of cultural practices, is relevant to the study of the state: "The boundary between state and non-state realms is thus drawn through the contested cultural practices of bureaucracies, and people's encounters with, and negotiations of, these practices." Other ethnographies of the state have pointed to how local bureaucratic offices serve as material sites of encounter between the people and the state (Hansen and Stepputat 2005; Hull 2012a; Reeves et al.

2014; Graeber 2015). Gupta (2012) explores how bureaucracy reveals the functional and institutional aspects, as well as cultural and ideological constructions, of the state.

Many bureaucracies operate in a confusing and arbitrary way that perpetuate structural violence and poverty (Gupta 2012; Weinberg 2017). For example, in Islamabad the “modernist program for shaping social order” expanded into “a regime of paper documents” where urban planning and the bureaucracy therein is about maintaining order (Hull 2012b). At the same time, Hull (2012b, 245) emphasizes the concept he calls “participatory bureaucracy.” He expounds on how people will always find a way to mediate in bureaucracy in ways that work for their advantage. I find parallels there with my findings in Ürümchi. Other scholars have written about bureaucracy in China as well as disaggregated and fragmented institutions and bureaus, as well as their potential for participatory politics (Walder 1986; Lieberthal and Oksenberg 1988; Mertha 2008; Boland and Zhu 2009).

Graeber (2015) examines bureaucracy in the United States to reveal the ways that bureaucracy shapes daily life, perpetuates the cycle of poverty, and maintains social order, but also discusses the ways it can be used as a tool to some people’s advantage. Other studies also point to the mundane and banal aspects of bureaucracy as a site of the manifestation of state power (Chalfin 2006; Mountz 2010). Social order was enforced through administration of social services, surveillance, and policing that shaped daily life. In Chapter 4 and 6, I present the particularities of my case in the frightening reach of state power into daily life that was only made possible through strong authoritarian state power facilitated through neighborhood *shequ* that actively discriminated against minorities and the poor.

E. Ignoring the State through Escapism in the Body: Feminist Geopolitics

In the Uyghur context there exists a culture of escapism, such as dodging the police in homes and markets (see also Dautcher 2009). There is also a culture of refusal especially when it comes to the body, such as fasting during Ramadan despite restrictions against it. Thus, it makes sense to turn to feminist scholarship to understand the ways the body interacts with the state, territory, and power at multiple scales. I do not suggest that such bodily politics illustrate intentional acts of resistance against the state, but rather a push and pull negotiation over control in multiple and overlapping spaces. Smith (2012, 1523) writes: “Political and territorial projects relying on the participation of bodies can be thwarted—not through intentional resistance but through the materialities of ‘life itself.’” I offer escapism and survivance in cultural practices not as intentional resistance, but as contested spaces. In drawing on Smith (e.g., 2012, 2017) who argues that the body is a manifestation of territory, I clarify that the spaces of escape in Ürümchi and the bodies that interact with those spaces are a form of contested territory. Although Smith does not work in China, her research in Ladakh in the Jammu and Kashmir state of India also concerns controversy over territorial control manifested in ethno-religious divisions between Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims in the region, where inter-ethnic marriages are controversial and women’s bodies become a site of contested control. Her research is still relevant because her theories about territory and the body related to love and marriage in a controversial ethno-cultural religious context apply to the bodily cultural practices of Uyghurs, who also have strong taboos against Han-Uyghur marriage (see Smith 2009).

In the Chinese and Uyghur contexts, marriage, child bearing, wearing the headscarf, and fasting during Ramadan for Muslims in China represent territory at different scales of the body and household. While the rules and regulations of the Chinese government attempt to enforce a scientific vision of family planning, for example, Uyghur customs around marriage and

childbearing ignore those visions. Ramadan fasting is similar, where the government regularly propagates the health risks for doing so, while Uyghur insist on the health benefits. While the Chinese government engages in projects, including eviction and incarceration of Uyghurs, to establish and maintain a homogenous national landscape within its circumscribed sovereign territory, the Uyghurs are continuously engaging in cultural and religious practices that counter that vision by connecting with their Persian, Turkish and Arabic roots. This does not go unnoticed by the state: in 2017-2018, most imports from Turkey were banned, Arabic names were forbidden, and celebrating the Persian holiday Noruz was punished. Previously, these practices connected Uyghurs with their cultural roots in other places outside of China.

Since in the Uyghur context, embodied ethno-cultural identities are an important part of everyday life, from wearing the headscarf to eating Halal food, feminist scholars provide a useful window into better understanding the way bodies become political (Yuval-Davis 1997; Stoler 2010). Feminist political geographers have linked the female body to territorial nationalism (e.g., Mayer 2000; Gökarıksel 2009; Hyndman 2010). Borrowing from feminist geography, I pay particular attention to the scale of the body as a mode of disrupting state territory (Smith, Swanson, and Gökarıksel 2016). Feminist geographers such as Smith in particular have demonstrated how power not only resides in formal institutions such as the state, but also in networks of relationships rooted in the domestic sphere and body:

A disembodied or body-less geopolitical approach...would not only omit the experiences of those who bear the brunt of geopolitical practice but would actually misidentify the nature of the political practices altogether... [Bodies are] not the side effects of geopolitical practice but its *principal manifestation*' (Smith 2012, 1523-24, emphasis added).

Drawing on Hyndman and De Lewis (2004, 535) who write that “gendered processes of identity construction [exist] in the context of competing militarised nationalisms,” anxieties over territory in a borderland region are played out as a possessive strategy on Uyghur bodies. As a result of

insecurity over territorial and economic dispossession, the boundaries of the Uyghur moral community are strictly enforced on the Uyghur body (see also Fluri 2014 on corporeal insecurity and geopolitics). Even intimate decisions based on marriage, sex, and gender are inexorably tied to the politicization of religion by the state and the patriarchy. The politicization of religion as played out on the Uyghur body is part of a broader geopolitical discourse on territorial control over contested national homeland in a border region. These restrictions are placed on women by their male and female relatives, as well as contradictory restrictions on their dress and body by the state, such as through family planning policies.

F. Post-Structural Approaches to the Body

My approach uses a post-structural approach of situated knowledge (e.g., Fluri 2011). In using this framework, specifically examining the link between territory and the body, I first build on Fassin's (2011) approach to the embodied violence of the state and the traces of structural and political violence on bodies. I draw on Fassin's (2011, 284) examination of Foucault's exploration into subjectivity and knowledge in terms of how truth is extracted from the body:

The body is not only the site where power is exerted or resisted, it is also the site where truth is sought or denied. Whereas much has been written on power and the body...there is still much to be explored about truth and the body...Instead of analyzing the origin of violence...I suggest examining its effects. Or better said: its trace. If power leaves traces on bodies, what sort of truth does the state—and more generally society—extract from them?

For example, in Uyghur society, the body displays proof of virginity and piousness as evidence in the body as to whether one is a worthy bride or not. Some who choose to gender bend also reveal the truth of not conforming to Uyghur patriarchal and heteronormative expectations, where the truth of rebelliousness to traditional Uyghur values is revealed in the body. Truth is extracted from the body and the body is used as a site of evidence for ethnic loyalty, which is caught up in geopolitical narratives of contested territory. The mundane narratives of everyday life, such as

through escapism in Xinjiang, reflect geopolitical contests of territory in the ways that population is an object of “postcolonial cartographic anxiety” and vulnerabilities (Smith 2011, 456).

Examinations of the body forms the foundation to understanding the data collected in Xinjiang through the bureaucracy and surveillance of policing. Uyghur bodies are crucial sites of ethno-cultural and religious identity as tied to broader narratives of Han and Uyghur conflict. The connection between bodies, ethnicity, and geopolitics, and how that is related to the body, morals, and knowledge is significant. Specifically, the body is used as evidence of ethnic loyalty (Fluri and Piedalue 2017).

Using these frameworks, I show that while the state succeeds in permeating even the most intimate of spaces, Uyghurs exercise their ability to exercise agency by dictating intimate decisions about marriage, sex, gender, and reproduction through social norms and expectations that dictate their lives (Smith, Swanson, and Gökarıksel 2016). I draw on similarities to Smith’s (2011, 457) fieldwork: “In Leh District, the women and men that I interviewed spoke about marriage and children not only as individual and emotional choices, but also as decisions inflected with geopolitical concerns.” This is how my friends also described the pressure of social expectations to me. They would frequently tell me, “We are not alone in this world, we have our family and our society to take into consideration. We do not make decisions in isolation.” The conflicting efforts of the Chinese state, Uyghur patriarchal society, and individuals contest the ability to exercise authority over their own bodies. In other words, it is not a black and white picture of power, but rather a complex inter-weaving power relations between Uyghur society, Chinese nation-state, and individuals.

The seemingly mundane decisions over clothing, marriage, and gender presentation are situated in a broader geopolitical conflict over the Uyghur territory where “bodies not

only *are* territory but also *make* territory” (Smith 2012, 1511, emphasis in original). These banal everyday practices are where geopolitical and individual narratives intersect, and where bodies constitute territory (Smith 2012, 1523). While feminist literature has engaged with power and the body for a long time, I choose to engage with the feminist political geography and feminist critical geopolitics as the primary theoretical lens, in order to use scale, space, and the political as the primary areas of interest in examining the body (Mountz 2018). Drawing on Smith’s (2011) engagement with the body as territory and Mountz’s (2018, 4) argument that “the body is also a site where sovereignty is enacted, performed, and claimed,” I build on material and post-structural approaches to the body to examine situated knowledges to challenge definitions of territory, and illustrate how the body is constituted by and constitutes territory (Smith 2011; Secor 2002; Fluri 2011, 2014; Hyndman 2007). The practice of territorialization is manifest in mundane practices of the body and social norms (Smith 2012, 1515). For example, looking at veiling practices of the headscarf, while a banal practice of everyday life, is an example of the ways in which the body becomes marked by performances of social norms and expectations (Mahmood 2005; Gökarıksel 2009), ethnocultural difference (Secor 2007), and an example of embodied nationalism (Mayer 2012).

Smith (2013, 58) writes that borderland territory creates geopolitical discourses that affects residents’ notions of insecurity down to the scale of bodily politics:

I suggest attention to how life on the margins can engender a border sensibility: a multiple-sense of being on the edge of the nation and on the edge of an uncertain future. This can drive attempts to bound and defend not only the physical borders of the nation, but the boundaries of the body, and of ‘communities,’ as territorialized in everyday spaces.

Similar to Smith’s (2012) research, Uyghur society desperately attempts to defend their “community” through bodily practices in the midst of Chinese nation-state territorial entrenchment on the land (see also Das and Das 2007). For example, virginity before marriage and modesty is

particularly important as part of Islamic practice for Uyghur subjects amidst ever-encroaching Han subjects imagined as atheist and promiscuous. These social norms and expectations of female chastity do not exist outside of the geopolitical narratives of Uyghur territory on the borderlands and at the convergence of state territories. In referring to “borderland territory,” I go beyond simply the physical borders of the nation-state, instead zooming in on the ways in which the body and communities are bounded and protected through morality. I examine the ways in which the body both rejects and embraces territorialization.

Using these frameworks, I argue that Uyghurs represent bodily forms of territory that exist as difference—holes in the net of state territory—that both constitute the state and push against it. In addition to Chinese nation-state territory, the body also confronts expectations of Uyghur society:

Struggles for territory are not contests over bounded state space alone, but are also struggles over the bodies that populate that space. Through their embodied participation in projects that reject or embrace state or national territorialization, the lives of citizens, refugees and residents are imbued with geopolitical meaning. (Smith 2011, 457)

The body is part of a strategy by Uyghurs to materialize their national territory. The moral boundaries of their community are under constant threat of elimination (see also Simpson 2014). The body is both oppressed by these norms and resists these demands for its conformity. Multiple vectors of power are both repressive and productive in different ways, and the body embraces and rejects expectations and norms. The body challenges and constitutes multiple and contested territories. The politicization of religion is situated in larger geopolitical narratives of contested borderland territory as manifested in bodily practices (see also Fluri and Piedalue 2017).

G. Settler Colonialism and Refusal

I draw on settler colonial literature to expand understanding of political-economic and territorial networks of erasure and elimination in authoritarian contexts. Settler colonialism is an

appropriate framework to Xinjiang because of the history of the dispossession of land, oil, natural gas, jade, and other resource extraction from their traditional homeland that has occurred under economic and colonial militarization policies since the 1700s, but especially since the 1880s (Perdue 2005; Bovingdon 2010; Brophy 2016; Schluessel 2016; Cliff 2016). The dispossession studies literature (see more below) further unpacks the idea of claiming a homeland while settler colonial logics of elimination and replacement destroy and undermine that homeland (e.g., Moreton-Robinson 2015; Camp 2016; Saldana-Portillo 2016; Gago 2017). China's autonomous regions do not have independent sovereignty. Also, China does not even recognize indigeneity as a political, social, or cultural possibility in China. However, China and Uyghur scholarship underutilizes of the settler colonial studies literature (see Byler 2017, 2018; Stoler, McGranahan and Perdue 2007 as exceptions). However, the settler colonial literature offers Uyghur studies an incorporation of a strong territorial component of social science that has thus far been lacking in China studies. For the Chinese context, there are no claims to "indigenous land use rights," nor "reservations" where the minorities can claim sovereignty over legal rights or political control. Nor does the Chinese context retain the same politics of recognition (Povinelli 2002; Coulthard 2014). Furthermore, most Uyghurs do not exercise a political identity of indigeneity, theirs is more a cultural and religious identity than political identity. For these reasons, I do not use the term "indigenous" to describe the Uyghurs, but I do describe the overall situation as an example of settler colonialism.

Settler colonialism scholars have criticized both assimilation and multicultural discourses as part of a "politics of recognition" that only serve to reproduce and justify the existing colonial logics of sovereignty (Simpson 2014; Weiss 2016). However, the discourse of a "unified yet diverse" multi-*minzu* state is indeed related to the discourse of multiculturalism that Povinelli

(2002) critiques. While there are some particularities to the Chinese and Uyghur context, there are connections to settler colonialism in North America and Australia because of the broader patterns of systematic elimination of minorities and minority culture, marginalization, and dispossession that Uyghurs experience (Wolfe 2006; Thum 2014; Byrd 2015; Schluessel 2016; Byler 2018). The broader situation in China is about one group controlling another for imperial control and power over territory (Stoler, McGranahan, and Perdue 2007). Settler colonialism exists for the purpose of gaining control of territory, extracting resources for economic profit, and eliminating marginalized groups and cultures that are already in that space (Yuval-Davis 1997; Coulthard 2014). Settler colonialism is thus relevant to the Uyghur context (Byler 2018).

Nonetheless, settler colonialism is an extremely political term to be used to describe the Chinese context. First, the Chinese adamantly deny any accusations that they are a colonial power. Second, the historical use of colonialism to describe Western interference in China around the time of the Opium War means that colonialism is a very politically sensitive term in China. Using it to describe the Uyghur situation carries serious political implications that, from the perspective of Chinese state officials, threaten the territorial integrity of China and could be seen as “separatist” rhetoric. However, I believe that the term is useful and relevant to the Xinjiang context and continue to choose to use it despite the potential risk to my future career.

Within the settler colonialism literature, three terms are used in the dissertation: survivance, refusal, and lived citizenship. I borrow the concept of “survivance” from Vizenor (1998, 2008), a literary scholar who describes how indigenous people in settler colonial contexts desire for more than mere physical survival, but also creative engagement through stories, presence, and agency. Vizenor (1998, 15) defines survivance in the following way: “Survivance...is more than survival, more than endurance or mere response; the stories of survivance are an active

presence...survivance is an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (emphasis added). Vizenor is specifically writing for survivance and against the American Indian was “victim” trope. While scholars deem many actions as resistance, this may construct a false victimizer versus victim dichotomy that takes away agency (Scott 1985). As Vizenor (2008, 1) writes, “Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.” For Vizenor, survivance is a way to challenge the victim narrative. For example, Vizenor uses humor instead of tragedy in his stories to reject the false romance of victimry (see also Fluri 2019).

The practices that I witnessed illustrate survivance because the Uyghurs are not simply victims, but multi-dimensional subjects. A more comprehensive perspective that includes the spatial, economic, and cultural dynamic context of Uyghur people and their homeland is necessary to provide a more accurate representation of China and the Uyghurs. By closely examining modes of escape and coping in the midst of heavy state surveillance, I shed light on the neglected issue of socioeconomic inequality and state territorialization as a contested social relation in the Uyghur community. In many cases, Uyghurs are agents rather than victims, where their subjectivity that could not be reduced to victimhood and oppression. For Vizenor (1998, 15), survivance is related to transmotion, a concept about one’s control over mobility that challenges sovereignty, which expresses migration as a value:

The connotations of transmotion are creation stories, totemic visions...that sense of native motion and an active presence, is *sui generis* sovereignty. Native transmotion is survivance, a reciprocal use of nature, not a monotheistic, territorial sovereignty. Native stories of survivance are the creases of transmotion and sovereignty.

Although there are important differences between the Chinese context and the North American or Australian settler colonial context, the analytic of survivance provides useful vocabulary to understanding the everyday practices of Uyghurs in Xinjiang.

Simpson (2014) provides the useful analytic of refusal to understand the ways people reject existing territorial political orders through lived citizenships. Simpson (2014, 175) argues that such lived citizenships,⁴⁸ defined as the everyday encounters, practices, and narratives of belonging, serve as a way to refuse *both* colonial state citizenships and tribal membership rules and regulations: I use Simpson's (2014) definition of lived citizenship to mean the "affective sense of being" (175) created through narratives of "grounded, everyday life of feeling" (191) made from the "words and actions that are issued in the everyday moments of exchange" (171). Furthermore, Simpson (2014) theorizes the refusal to be recognized as a citizen of the colonial sovereign and a refusal to disappear at the same time. For Simpson, lived citizenships are practices of refusing the settler colonial imperative of elimination and territorial logics of dispossession, as well as the discriminatory practices of tribal membership rules. Simpson provides examples of refusing formal tribal membership recognition *and/or* formal citizenship of a sovereign power. Instead of recognition by the colonial sovereign or tribal leaders, those engaging in refusal create spaces and codes of in-group belonging and recognition. As Simpson writes:

These feeling [lived] citizenships are narratively constructed, hinge upon sociality, and are tied in ways to the simultaneous topography of colonialism *and* Iroquoia... They are a relentless process and practice, as Mohawks come up against the state and against each other, as they enfold each other into ambits of critique, refusal, care, and ambivalence in spite of forces that would have them completely banished... This desire [for lived citizenships] is made from the intimacy, the knowledge, and the messiness of everyday life, and from the bonds of affection and disaffection that tie people into communities and communities into nations, even if they are unrecognizable or unrecognized. (Simpson 2014, 175-176, emphasis in original)

Simpson's theoretical analytic of refusal is useful to the Uyghur case in regards to a refusal to be eliminated in the midst of territorial dispossession as a *mode of belonging*. I build on Simpson to write about the refusal through the narrative enactment, experience and performance of feeling and

⁴⁸ Simpson (2014) also refers to lived citizenships interchangeably as "primary citizenships" and "feeling citizenships."

lived citizenships as Uyghur identity, *not* in terms of an active form of refusal of political rights or state rights.

In terms of the Uyghur case, I build on Byler's (2017) analysis of refusal, where refusal is not an outright action to reject one's citizenship of China, but rather everyday practices of belonging in the Uyghur, Turkic, and Muslim world while ignoring the Chinese world. I use the terms refusal and lived citizenships to be about the everyday practices of performing identity and belonging that connect with the broader Muslim world outside of China. I use the spaces of bubbles to understand the ways that Uyghurs create momentary times and spaces of refusal. Refusal is enacted through lived citizenships of belonging that defies the logics of settler colonialism and the governance, membership, and citizenships that thus come along with that (see also Sobo 2016 on refusal as belonging). I build on this literature to demonstrate the ways Uyghurs enact refusal and ignore the state in their everyday lives through performances of belonging. I define performance as "calculated presentation of self in everyday life" as an aspect of national identity (Hyndman and De Alwis 2004; Mahmood 2005; Gökarıksel 2009 on performances of social norms and expectations).⁴⁹

H. Dispossession

I use the analytic of "dispossession" in this dissertation as vocabulary to better understand social relations in Ürümchi today (see also Byler 2018). I use the analytic of "dispossession" to mean the geographies, materialities, and ideologies that strip people of land and livelihood. Dispossession occurs in China in the context of alienation of minorities who are belonging, but

⁴⁹ I do not mean "performativity" at Butler (1993) uses it, and I do not mean dramatization or festive form of cultural performances that have a limited temporal dimension and are framed events separate from everyday life as Guss (2000, 8-9) defines performance as an event with a limited time span.

also not belonging, in/to the imagined “nation-state” (Simpson 2011; Byrd 2015; Moreton-Robinson 2015). The Uyghur people are undergoing “triple dispossession”: First, the historic dispossession of Uyghurs from their homeland and the resources of their land through military agricultural farms (Perdue 2005; Schluessel 2016). Second, economic dispossession in the rural areas by development and capitalism causes social relations of inequality as evident in the cities, the urban/rural divide, and displacement of Uyghur from rural areas to the cities. Third, political dispossession by bureaucracy, surveillance and policing causes eviction of rural migrants from the city. Using the concept of dispossession, I explore poverty as the product of tight state control and economic exploitation.

For the Uyghurs, dispossession of land via urbanization and militarization is clear (Becquelin 2004; Dautcher 2009; Cliff 2016; Byler 2018). They have long experienced dispossession economically via “development” and resource extraction, as well as dispossession of land via militarization of agriculture (Bovingdon 2010). As Moreton-Robinson (2015, 152) points out, colonial paranoia over security is tied to “white anxiety of dispossession” and an acknowledgement and anxiety that they could lose what they have stolen:

Refusal to acknowledge Indigenous dispossession is symptomatic of anxiety of dispossession. One does not need to defend one’s security unless one perceives it to be threatened. The preoccupation with security is to bring the possibility of dispossession into being, to know it is possible in a geographical context that does not share this history. (Moreton-Robinson 2015, 140)

Although there are differences between “Han” ethnicity and “whiteness,” important parallels exist regarding the Han *minzu* as a majority group that is actively involved in settler colonialism (see also Mullaney et al. 2012; Vasantkumar 2012).

The word “race” is controversial when describing the Uyghurs. Discussions of race in China are sometimes reduced to *minzu*, a term that is more closely related to both civic and ethnic nationalism rather than the biological differences that define “race” as a concept (see

Chapter 1 for a history of the “one race” discourse in China). Dikotter (1992) wrote about ideas of race in China during the late-Qing and Republican era up until the time of the Communist revolution, when race was central in the Chinese debate over national identity (see also Brophy 2016, 114). Byler (2018, 68) describes “the new sequence of race-making that emerged in Ürümchi,” where dispossession and racialized violence are mutually constituted. Racism is at work in Xinjiang today, where Uyghurs are located at the margins of the state in material and symbolic ways. Uyghurs themselves also commented on themselves as a “racial” category when comparing themselves to African Americans in the United States. One interlocuter told me:

The Uyghurs’ situation is basically similar to Black people in the US. What I mean is, Black people dominate most sports and most music genres. That’s similar to here with Uyghurs. And yet, despite their skills, they will always be discriminated against. Take Obama for example. About half the country voted for him, and yet he still experiences prejudice against him for his skin color. It’s similar for the Uyghurs. No matter what I do or what I accomplish, I will always be Uyghur and seen as such, and nobody can look past that. (2017 conversation)

In using the term “race” in the context of the Uyghurs, I draw on Stoler (1995) produces a genealogy of race that examines the eroticization of colonial bodies, arguing that the body of the Other constituted new racial, sexual, and moral distinctions in defining a new sense of the European bourgeois self: “The body of the Other made it possible to refine internal categories in terms of race to meet the biopolitical need for precise definitions of legal persons, and with that to bestow property rights, citizenship, and welfare in the newly benevolent...states of nineteenth-century Europe” (Wilder 1996, 1087 on Stoler 1995). The production of space occurs in racial terms within national geographies, where racial categories are reproduced in how people see spaces and how subjects are produced in that space (Saldana-Portillo 2016).

Moreton-Robinson (2015, 6) connects race, migration, possession, and belonging. In doing so, she makes an important claim: Belonging is not a personal quality based on emotional

attachment to a place; rather, belonging is bound to the structural and racialized logics of capitalism. According to Moreton-Robinson (2015), as a result of white patriarchal sovereignty founded on capitalist logics of possession, Indigenous populations in Australia find themselves homeless or out of place, strangers in their own land. Uyghurs too find themselves homeless in Ürümqi (Chapter 5 and 6). According to Moreton-Robinson, belonging to a place is based on differences founded in class, race, and gender based on structural violence. In Australia, belonging and possession is impossible for nonwhites and Indigenous populations due to the racialized and structural conditions under the logic of capitalism (Moreton-Robinson 2015). When talking about the Uyghur context, Byler (2018, 12) uses the terms “dispossession” and “terror capitalism” to describe the importance of economic development in the lives of the Uyghurs, writing that “processes of racialization...accompanied the arrival of terror capitalism” in Ürümqi. In the Chinese and Uyghur contexts, I discuss both development, expansion, colonialism, and belonging in terms of Uyghurs and Han settlers in Xinjiang. The settler colonial context of Xinjiang’s ethnic context displays important implications for better understanding uneven authoritarian state power and territory. In the empirical chapters that follow, I use the vocabulary defined here to make sense of what I saw in Xinjiang, China.

INTERLUDE

May 2017: Muhemmet and I sat and talked on my balcony today. The mountains that surround Ürümchi loomed in the distance, and as dusk set in, the city lights began to twinkle in the gray smoggy haze that surrounded the city. In the distance, row upon row of high rises were surrounded by green netting, bamboo scaffolding, and cranes in the process of construction.

“I wish I could change my ethnicity on my ID card to anything else but Uyghur. Kazakh would be fine, just anything but Uyghur. I could just tell people I’m a Han from Sichuan, and as long as my ID said ‘Han,’ no one would know the difference,” Muhemmet said laughing as he pulled out his ID card and examined it.

“I need to change it to anything else. Right now, it’s not a good time to be Uyghur in this country,” Muhemmet said between puffs of his cigarette as he squatted on the steps in front of my balcony.

“What about Tibetan?” I asked.

Muhemmet sputtered as he burst out laughing.

“Okay, anything but Uyghur and Tibetan, those are the two I don’t want to be right now.

Honestly, I don’t care if people are prejudiced against Uyghurs. If they have that idea, or if they think that stuff, whatever, I don’t care. Think what you want. But when it starts to affect my daily life, that’s when it bothers me. And it does. It seriously affects my everyday life, everywhere I go and everything I do,” he said with frustration while smiling and shaking head.

“How so?” I asked. “*Qandaq?*”

“What do you mean ‘how so?’ It’s everywhere, all the time, you know this!”

“I do know, but give me an example,” I asked.

“For one, my company got shut down last year because we are Uyghur. Take for another example hotels. I cannot stay in a hotel because I’m Uyghur. And take for example the check stations on the highways. We have to go through those check stations a bunch of times just to go from one city to another.”

“When did it change so that checks were everywhere?” I asked.

“I remember—and now this wasn’t that long ago, probably like 2007, 2008, around that time—when you didn’t need an ID card to ride the train, to do pretty much anything. I remember our whole college [sports] team went to Qingdao on the train, and nobody even brought their ID. We stayed in a dorm most of the time, but we stayed in Beijing for one night, and we only needed one ID card for like 25 people. That’s it. A lot of Uyghurs didn’t even have ID cards at that time.

It's not like that anymore.

I remember one time, before the ID card was important, that I lost my wallet with my ID card in it. It's a good thing that didn't happen nowadays—I would be screwed if I lost my ID card. Nowadays you can get arrested for not having your ID card on you for any reason. If I don't carry my ID, I can't go in anywhere, I can't even go into a bookstore.”

“Yeah, the checks are everywhere,” I said. I couldn't go anywhere without my passport either.

“Now, I get checked all the time when I travel. When I went to Hangzhou [last week], I was greeted by police officers on the train before departure. ‘I was waiting for you,’ I heard a voice say to me and I said, ‘Do I know you?’ [laughing] then I looked up and saw it was the police. I was like, ‘Oh sorry.’ The lady cop asked for my ID card, and I thought, ‘Seriously, you want that? Because I *just* bought a train ticket, which was how you knew I was a Uyghur sitting in this seat. So, you have all my information, and you need my ID card again?’ It doesn't make any sense. [laughing] She also looked through my phone, pictures, and videos. I had a video of some role-playing knife fighting thing I had seen in Beijing, and she asked me, ‘What's this?’ I had to stop for a second because I didn't even remember. Then she said, ‘Fine, just delete it.’ I said, ‘Anything else?’ She said ‘No,’ and left. When I got off the train in Hangzhou, there were some cops or maybe military, I'm not sure—I don't even know; they could just been normal security guards, but they had machine guns—and they saw me and beckoned me over and asked me for my ID card and asked, ‘What are you doing here and where are you staying?’ [laughing] Then, they checked my phone too.

Nowadays, when I'm flying or in a train station, I just walk straight up to the security guys with my ID right next to my face and say, ‘Check me.’ And I'm not worried, I'm confident because I have *this*,” he said taking out his ID and pointing to it.

“It says right here that I'm a resident of the People's Republic of China. I'm a part of this country, I'm a citizen, and I'm not a criminal. But that's not it. It's my way of saying to them, ‘I know you're looking for me. And I know you're looking for me just because I'm Uyghur and for no other reason, and there is no reason to be suspicious of me.’ It's my way of pointing out to them that they discriminate, and I know it, and they know it. It's makes them really uncomfortable. I can see it on their face. They try to smile at me, and I just stare at them unflinching like, ‘I know what you're trying to do to your own people.’ I can see it on their faces, the guilt and the doubt in themselves and in their job, like ‘What am I even doing here, checking innocent people of my own country?’ I'm saying, ‘I know you're going to look for me, to chase after me in the train station, so before you even do that, I'm going to approach you.’

The only reason I know I'm Uyghur is because they put that label on us. They were playing around with us like a game, they were playing around with history. They thought it would be a really fun idea, an interesting experiment to call all of us Uyghur and put it on our ID cards. Well, it might have been funny for them, but it turned out shit for us.”

His usual playfulness is gone and he's talking with me in a dead serious tone, his eyes wide and fixed on mine, his face unsmiling.

CHAPTER 4

SERVICE, SAFETY, AND FEAR IN THE *SHEQU*: BUREAUCRACY, POLICING, AND MISTRUST IN XINJIANG, CHINA

“I have replaced the notion that bureaucracies represent the rationalization of power in a disciplinary society with a very different picture—one in which the entire process is shot through with contingency and barely controlled chaos” (Gupta 2012, 14).

In the interlude vignette preceding this chapter, Muhemmet describes the situation in 2017 when ID checks and surveillance of Uyghurs in streets, train stations and airports were commonplace. He also describes how the label of “Uyghur” on the ID card meant constant police harassment. The computer database and bureaucratic system created ID cards and forms legible subjects (Krohn-Hansen and Nustad 2005). The ID cards enforced the ethnicity labels and the databases kept track of citizens as tied to an ID card. The network of surveillance and policing in Uyghur neighborhoods of the city were sometimes disguised through “social services” of neighborhood “community centers.” As Muhemmet describes, surveillance and policing affected everyday life through the administration that maintained and kept track of ID cards and their locations.

Declarations of government and police “service” were on signs in both Uyghur and Chinese at the entrance of every apartment building and store in the two Uyghur-majority districts of

Ürümchi.⁵⁰ Signs read messages such as, “Dear respected resident: You are the object of our service. We hope that in your daily life when you come across any type of problem that you will contact us. We are wholeheartedly at your service! Community Center Service Phone Number: 5555555. Police Station Phone Number: 5555555.”⁵¹ The bulletins were accompanied by the photos, names, and cell phone numbers of the neighborhood’s police chief and the community center’s head cadres (photos of these bulletins not included to protect the privacy of those employees). In addition to signs at entrances to buildings, messages of “at your service” and “for your safety” echoed on ubiquitous propaganda signs and announcements put up on walls and gates by the neighborhood-level community center (Ch: 社区 *shequ*, Uy: *ahaliler komteti*) employees. Besides housing the local police, the main duties of the *shequ* in Ürümchi included distributing social welfare checks and services, and registering rural migrants.⁵² The *shequ* in China serve as a window into how the ideological and material aspects of state power manifest in the lives of neighborhood residents, where the materialities of the state effect are realized through bureaucratic regimes of rationality and police surveillance (Mitchell 1999).

⁵⁰ Sayabagh and Tengritagh Districts (Ch: 天山区 *Tianshan Qu* and 沙依巴克区 *Shayibake Qu*). See Chapter 1 for maps and additional context on these districts.

⁵¹ The series of the number 5 is a fake phone number to protect the identity of this *shequ*. In Chinese: 尊敬的居民您好！您是我们的服务对象，希望您在日常生活中遇到各类问题及时与我们联系，我们将竭诚为你们服务！

⁵² Rural migrants are required to apply for “temporary residence permits” when they come to live or work in the city.

Every few years in China, neighborhood residents elect pre-selected candidates to head the “management committees”⁵³ and “resident committees”⁵⁴ that run the *shequ*. Neighborhood *shequ* are located throughout China’s cities. As the lowest level of government administration and public security, the *shequ* function in China as key points of contact between the local government and city residents. They hold trainings for the unemployed, schedule vaccinations for children, and manage subsidized fruit and vegetable markets (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

The *shequ* in Ürümchi often employed local neighborhood residents, which in a Uyghur neighborhood are Uyghurs. This included people usually vulnerable to unemployment, such as young mothers or recent vocational college graduates. The *shequ* functioned as an important source of employment in the Ürümchi neighborhoods. State power in the *shequ* was not just represented by Han people, but rather by Uyghurs as well, which facilitated the bureaucracy and surveillance among Uyghurs who did not speak Chinese. Uyghur *shequ* employees also complicated a simply binary of Han versus Uyghur when it came to the state. The fuzzy distinctions between state territorial and Uyghur spaces are not discrete and bounded, but rather overlapping.

⁵³ 管理委员会

⁵⁴ 居民委员会



Figure 4.1: A typical sign outside of one branch of a *shequ*. Note the logo in the middle with two hands holding each other to signify the helping and caring functions of the community centers. This sign, like all signs in Xinjiang, has both the Chinese characters and Uyghur written in a modified Arabic alphabet. The larger size of the Chinese versus Uyghur writing indicates the way that minority *minzu* languages, while still included, are relegated to a less important position. Their slogan underneath the clasping hands reads: “Connect Emotion for the People’s Welfare, Whole-Heartedly Serve (情系民生 全心服务). The left side reads in Chinese and Uyghur: “Ürümchi City Labor and Society Protection Bureau: Tengritagh District Bahuliang *Shequ* Internship and Training Center for the Unemployed.” The right side reads: “Ürümchi City *Shequ* Vegetable and Food Direct Sale Point: Solidarity Road Area Management Committee Bahuliang *Shequ*.” Source: Photo by author, September 2016.



Figure 4.2: This is a picture of a fruit and vegetable market subsidized by the *shequ*. They were sometimes called “blue houses” because they were most often a blue color. The sign in red at the top reads in Chinese and Uyghur: Tengritagh District Xinjiang University *Shequ* Farmer’s Market. The Uyghur translation reads: “Neighborhood Farmer’s Market.” *Shequ* was sometimes translated into Uyghur as “neighborhood.” Note again the logo on the left with two hands holding each other to signify helping and caring functions of the community centers with the same slogan underneath and hidden by the door, “Connect Emotion for the People’s Welfare, Whole-heartedly Serve” (情系民生 全心服务). On the wall in Chinese and Uyghur a sign announces: “Tengritagh District Election for Committees Announcement” with instructions on how to vote. *Source*: Photo by author, September 2016.

Despite the rhetoric of safety, service and community of the *shequ*, I found a significant prevalence of fear and confusion about the role of the *shequ* in the daily lives of the Uyghur residents I lived amongst and spoke to. The *shequ* in Ürümchi worked with heavy-handed controls through administration and policing that limited citizen freedoms. The *shequ* in its administrative

and security branches functioned as a tool that perpetuates the resilience of authoritarian state power in Ürümchi.

In the previous literature on *shequ* in China, scholars agree that the *shequ* function as a bridge between state authoritarianism and city residents: both as a physical contact point between state power and the people, but also a method of distributing welfare aid and social services (Bray 2008; Read 2012). While my study deviates from Lieberthal and Lampton's (1992) focus on institutions and bureaus, I build on their model to further extend the understanding of the fragmented aspects of the state through citizen interactions with the *shequ* in Ürümchi. Chapter 3 contains more details on "fragmented authoritarianism" and the other theoretical underpinnings of this chapter.

In the "closed context" (Koch 2013) of China where freedom of speech is not possible, *shequ* supposedly provide a medium for airing grievances and facilitating public participation in a non-democratic context (Boland and Zhu 2009). According to previous scholarship based on surveys, *shequ* have increased state infrastructural power and regime legitimacy in urban China (Heberer and Göbel 2011). However, these studies were conducted in eastern China with a majority of Han residents (see Joniak-Lüthi and Bulag 2016 for an introductory exploration of governance in northwest China). Scholars of Xinjiang have found that economic inequalities and spreading urbanization have affected majority-minority *minzu* relations and social life (Kobi 2016; Pawan and Niyazi 2016).⁵⁵ Tibetan autonomous counties have also experienced shifting power

⁵⁵ Pawan and Niyazi (2016) focus on the challenges and transformations of resettlement and only briefly mention the *shequ* in two sentences. The focus of their article is on lifestyle changes and adaptation strategies of resettled people in Xinjiang, not on governance patterns or the *shequ*. It is also important to note that the *shequ* was established based on over 30 years of state socialism in the work unit (*danwei*), so this was an extension of state authority that had already been in place for quite some time. More details on the history of the *shequ* are below.

relations caused by *shequ* governance away from minority community leaders and towards the state (Kojima and Kokubun 2002; Makley 2018), and in Tibetan and Hui regions in Qinghai (Grant 2018). Nonetheless, there have been no previous studies specifically focused on the *shequ* in Uyghur areas of northwest China.

My study investigates the *shequ* in Ürümchi, Xinjiang by answering the questions: How do citizens experience state bureaucratic power at the neighborhood level in their everyday lives? How are administration and policing related? What is the relationship between informality and authoritarianism? Using textual analysis of *shequ*-generated documents, interviews and participant-observation, I found that the state was experienced and perceived by Uyghur research participants as confusingly irrational and arbitrary, as well as fearfully powerful and violent. The result degraded mutual trust. Although historically there was not much trust between the Uyghurs and the state, I witnessed trust significantly decrease over the course of the time I was there, especially with increasing social regulation and surveillance carried out by the *shequ* starting in early 2017.

Although Xinjiang is an extreme case, the *shequ* in Ürümchi serve as a window into the state's periphery, which is key to the central government's statecraft at the core (Cartier and Oakes 2010). The *shequ* in Ürümchi served as an example of state power controlling minority bodies through confusion and fear, shedding light on the complex, circular, and sometimes banal nature of Chinese fragmented authoritarianism. The *shequ* facilitated the slow elimination of Uyghur cultural and social spaces through its oppressive and confusing embrace in red tape and police control. The *shequ* illustrated territorial control through bureaucracy, surveillance, and policing.

I investigate the Chinese state's implementation of neighborhood bureaucracy to emphasize the disjuncture between a rhetoric of service and practice of control. To begin, I provide

a literature review and then describe how the *shequ* and police function in Ürümchi with ethnic and class discrimination. Next, I discuss the implementation of state territorial control on the neighborhood level and the perspectives of such implementation by residents. Finally, I conclude that most Uyghur research participants experience and perceive the state through encounters with the *shequ*. These perceptions are that the state is irrational and arbitrary, on the one hand, and powerful and violent on the other hand.

I. Theory and Background

A. Bureaucracy and Policing: Visible and Invisible Forms of State Power

The notion of “care” and *inclusion* through the bureaucracy of the state inextricably results in structural violence (Gupta 2012). The “barely controlled chaos” of the bureaucracy is arbitrary irrationality, and evidence of a disaggregated state (Gupta 2012, 14). There exists an intertwined relationship between inclusion, care, and violence in the state (Li 2007). Herzfeld (1992) writes that the social production of indifference is related to bureaucracies that insulate themselves from social suffering (see also Graber 2015). While corruption plays a role in Gupta’s study and other studies on bureaucracy in India, I did not witness or hear about any low-level corruption occurring on the ground in my field site. However, my observation does not mean corruption was a non-issue, but the study of corruption is outside the scope of my field work. Corruption at the higher levels of government have been recorded (Cliff 2016), and local level corruption in other ways, such as through gifts and favors, still matters in other parts of China (Bachman 2017).

The *shequ* in Xinjiang reached into the citizens’ everyday lives. The nefarious and invisible aspects of state power attempted to create social order through a combination of bureaucratic administration and public security forces (Neocleous 2000). Neocleous (2008) advocates for the joining of a study of both public administration and security for a more complete understanding of

what makes up the police state: both in terms of the “social police” and social security as a way to maintain and fabricate social order, rather than simply uniformed men on the street (Neocleous 2000). In drawing on Neocleous’s (2000, 2008) theory of police power, the marriage between bureaucracy and policing in the *shequ* was used to maintain social order. In my field site, I found a link and disjuncture between care and security, where visible policing was a type of indifference to suffering (see Martin 2018a).

B. The History of the Shequ in China

The *shequ* is the contemporary umbrella term used to describe the neighborhood-level state administrative apparatus closely tied to various committees, such as the governance activities of management committees, resident committees, work committees, and Party work committees, which are elected neighborhood organizations at the lowest administrative level of the city government. These committees, along with street offices, existed throughout state socialism of the Mao era and form the backbone of the historical foundations of the *shequ*. The contemporary *shequ* organization system also replaced the historical legacy of the spatial order and discipline of the socialist work unit (*danwei*) of the Mao era (Bray 2005; Bray 2008; Tang 2012). According to Bray (2005), socialist governmentality was deployed during the Mao era through the *danwei*, which allowed expert knowledge, institutional discipline, and biopolitics to penetrate everyday life and produce a collective subjectivity.

Later, the *shequ* partially developed from the bureaucratic foundation, spatial organization, and socialist rhetoric of collectivity of the *danwei* (Huang 2006; Bray 2006; Bray 2008a; Boland and Zhu 2012). The *shequ* is now a way for the government to impinge on everyday lives through spatial order. Xu (2008) points out that in other ways the *shequ* is a new institution intended to

solve the social problems exacerbated by inequality arising out of the recent housing construction boom: crime, migrants, unemployment, and impoverished senior citizens.

The rapid pace of urbanization in China that followed the economic reforms of 1978 dramatically transformed social life and facilitated uneven development at many scales (e.g., Lin and Zhang 2014). The major changes of economic reform in urban areas brought into question for many citizens the legitimacy of single party-state rule and invited social instability across the country (e.g., Heberer and Göbel 2011). In response to the threat of instability caused by significant economic inequality, the Chinese state is engaging in efforts to increase political-economic power, social stability, and regime legitimacy (Tomba 2014). The proliferation of *shequ* in urban areas is one such effort. The *shequ* system began expanding significantly under the Hu Jintao leadership (2002-2012), as his top priority was social stability and the building of a “harmonious” society. As a result, a small but growing subset of literature is concerned with community governance and neighborhood organization in urban China.⁵⁶

Some scholars argue that the recent upsurge in *shequ* involvement in urban areas, especially in poor neighborhoods, illustrates an attempt to increase social stability and regime legitimacy during an era of unprecedented socioeconomic inequality in the cities (Bray 2006; Read 2012; Tomba 2014). They make a case that the *shequ* is a mode of state infrastructural power and regime legitimacy. Infrastructural power as defined by Mann (2008, 355) is the “capacity of the

⁵⁶ The community governance literature on urban China refers to this neighborhood organization with various terms, including: Resident Committees (RCs), *shequ*, and Administrative Grassroots Engagements (AGEs). I will refer to this neighborhood organization as “*shequ*.” Some of the other literature that falls under this category is primarily concerned with grassroots political reform, especially in rural areas (Perry and Goldman 2007), and homeowner associations (Tomba 2005; Read 2008). I am not including a discussion of that literature here, because I have chosen to focus on the urban *shequ*, not on homeownership and the resulting management companies.

state to actually penetrate civil society and implement its actions across its territories.” The goal of the *shequ* in Xinjiang and otherwise is to maintain control in neighborhoods where state retreat would otherwise lead to “chaos.”

Read (2012) describes the *shequ* activities as “Administrative Grassroots Engagements,” or AGEs, to describe how *shequ* organizations blur state-society boundaries by recruiting community members’ participation, encouraging residents’ self-governance, regulating social life (e.g., enforcing birth control policies), and providing a sounding board for grievances and complaints. Read (2012) writes that it is more difficult to challenge state rule when the state is your neighbor and your neighbor is the state (see also Tomba 2014). According to his survey of poor Beijing residents, AGEs give the state credibility and a sense of responsibility in caring for the community. AGEs blur state-society boundaries in the way the state penetrates everyday life and local or neighborhood politics. Heberer and Göbel (2011) and Read (2012) both found that the provision of material benefits was a major component of securing ruling legitimacy through the *shequ* in eastern China. However, the *shequ* in Ürümchi focuses on surveillance and policing that is different from eastern China: Rather than regime legitimacy, the *shequ* in Ürümchi produces illiberal sovereign power through policing where there are few limits on state power in order to establish social and political control.

Specifically, two studies show that since the late 1990s there has been *increased* social regulation in poor neighborhoods, especially among the migrant population, alongside *decreased* social regulation and rhetoric for self-governance in middle and upper class neighborhoods (Heberer and Göbel 2011; Tomba 2014). They find the Foucauldian governmentality analytic useful in the Chinese case because freedom is only for the “worthy,” where the Chinese regime

defines who is “high quality” and “low quality”⁵⁷ and therefore justifies surveillance only on “low quality” populations, mostly poor, rural migrants (Bray 2008; Heberer and Göbel 2011; Read 2012; Tomba 2014). The Chinese government’s “control the poor, but let the rich have more freedom” philosophy reminds China *shequ* scholars of illiberal governmentality. Minority *minzu* neighborhoods—where Uyghurs are a majority—are deemed bounded spaces where special rules apply. Certain populations are deemed worthy or unworthy, and policies justify surveillance and control of the unworthy in specific and circumscribed spaces. The *shequ* are examples of the rationalities of administrative governance and technologies of power that employ strategies to obtain self-discipline and neighborly discipline.

Some scholars have employed Foucauldian governmentality theories to understand *shequ* in China (Bray 2008; Heberer and Göbel 2011; Read 2012; Tomba 2014). The analytics of “illiberal governmentality” teases out the ways that the state employs techniques and strategies to “care” for a population in order to maintain control (Dean 2010; Opitz 2011). Specifically, the illiberal governmentality analytic is useful to understand the discursive aspects of the government propaganda. However, the analytic is limited in unpacking the state effect on citizen thought and behavior in everyday life. Instead, I focus on the term “fragmented authoritarianism” to describe the *shequ* in Xinjiang (Lieberthal and Lampton 1992). In many ways, the disaggregated state apparatus is ineffective in its capacity to carry out policies, control people’s individual movements, and to realize its goals. Territorial state power retains its material effects, practical significance, and ideological importance (Murphy 2013). For example, as much as the Chinese government would like to realize its power through winning over the hearts and minds of the Uyghurs, state sovereignty and territoriality in the region cannot and does not gain traction in winning over the

⁵⁷ Ch: 素质 *suzhi*

hearts and minds of individuals and does not define or dictate individual behavior, beliefs, or micro-spatial practices.

I examine *shequ* policy as a tool to maintain social order and authoritarian control through administration and policing. I employ ethnographic methods to better understand how social control is experienced by the people on the ground. The tension and contradiction between bureaucracy and the circumventing of attempted efforts at control is an important investigation in understanding the ways in which state power is experienced, reproduced, and ignored in everyday life.

II. Territorial Control through Bureaucratic Community Centers: Service, Confusion, and Mistrust

In addition to the visible aspects of a military police state, the *shequ* in Ürümchi provided something more nefarious: Invisible state control through confusion and bureaucracy that ultimately led to the eviction of rural migrants from the city. The visible and invisible, and material and ideological, aspects of the state worked together to maintain social control. The bureaucracy that requires migrant registration allowed for the removing of Uyghur rural migrants from Ürümchi in 2017. Accurate statistics on the exact numbers of Uyghur rural migrants who were evicted from Ürümchi are not available. Nevertheless, I provide ethnography of the events leading up to the evictions to provide context and experiences for some Ürümchi residents. The *shequ* serve as examples of the spatial aspects of state infrastructural and bureaucratic power. The bureaucracy exemplifies as much of a powerful and pervasive force in poor, rural migrants' lives as the military patrols and visible aspects of policing. In the previous literature, more attention has been paid to the violent and development aid aspects of an oppressive Chinese state, but neglect the bureaucratic, and thus more invisible, aspects of state power.

A. Background Information on Community Centers: Shequ in Ürümchi, Xinjiang

The community centers are called “*shequ*” in Chinese and are often code-switched in Uyghur as “*shechu*.” The Chinese character 社 “*she*” can be translated as “society,” or as “a group of families.” The character 区 “*qu*” is translated as “area, district, region, or ward.” The characters together 社区 “*shequ*” are usually translated into English as “community.” In Uyghur, the term “*shequ*” is sometimes translated as “*mehelle*,” which means “neighborhood.”⁵⁸ *Shequ* is also sometimes translated into Uyghur as “resident committee” (*ahaliler komteti*).

Especially in low-income and Uyghur-majority neighborhoods in Ürümchi, the *shequ* in Ürümchi administered state welfare tasks. In addition, the main “service” tasks of the *shequ* were summed up in one placard posted on the walls and building entrances of the Uyghur-majority neighborhoods: “1) Manage the Floating Population [rural migrants], 2) Obtain residence permits, visitors permits, or travel permits, 3) Spread propaganda and publicity, and 4) Serve the masses” (Poster seen in Ürümchi, March 2017).⁵⁹ This message was on a *Shequ* Work Committee Member Gridification (网格化) Management Personnel Placard with the name and phone number of the grid chief (网格长), and the “service activities” of that person. The gridification mentality of neighborhood space and restrictions on migrants’ mobility was a territorial aspect of *shequ* control designed for poor populations: Uyghurs and rural migrants were the object of such “service” and subject to increased registration requirements and permission to travel and have guests.

⁵⁸ See Dautcher (2009) for a more complete explanation of *mehelle*. Since *mehelle* is not a keyword for the Uyghur informants in the city, it seems quite possible that the *mehelle* has been replaced materially and/or ontologically by the *xiaoqu* and/or *shequ* as new conceptualizations of urban space. *Mehelle* generally is not a term used in urban Ürümchi, but since Dautcher’s (2009) study took place in the suburbs of Ghulja (from personal communication with Gardner Bovingdon in 2019). See also Pawan and Niyazi (2016) on the *mehelle* and *xiaoqu*.

⁵⁹ In Chinese: 流动人口管理, 入户走访, 宣传宣讲, 服务群众.

The *shequ* enforced restrictions on residency and migration. The *shequ* were responsible for home inspections and surveillance of residents, mostly renters and migrants. The *shequ* began enforcing control on household registrations for rural migrants in 2009. In 2014, the restrictions became stricter after a fatal car bombing in Ürümchi that was blamed on Uyghur terrorists, who were believed to be from the rural south of the region.

In Ürümchi, the *shequ* structure and levels of surveillance were based not only on wealth, as was common in eastern China, but also *minzu*. According to my interview data, *shequ* policies differed according to socioeconomic status as measured by *minzu*, homeownership, urban or rural status, and residence in Uyghur-majority or Han-majority neighborhood. According to the answers given to the questions I asked when analyzed in accordance with those four demographic factors (see Table 4.1), *shequ* policies differed according to socioeconomic status and *minzu*.

Table 4.1: Uyghur Interviewee Demographic Information

	Number of Uyghur Interviewees Based on Socio-Economic Status Demographic Table		
	Homeowners or living in their family-owned home	Renting from a landlord	Living in the school dorms
Living in a Han-majority district (north)	0	0	0
Urban <i>Hukou</i> living in a Uyghur-majority district (south)	16	3	3
Rural <i>Hukou</i> living in a Uyghur-majority district (south)	2	18	4

Table 4.1 shows that there were some variations across socioeconomic demographic groups of the interviewees: some urbanites did rent homes and some rural migrants owned homes.

Overall, consistent patterns emerged in terms of homeownership associated with urban status, and renting associated with rural status (see also Tomba 2014 on the relationship between urban status and homeownership in other parts of China). While accurate statistics on the exact numbers of the relationship between urban/rural status and homeownership are not available, other authors speak to the relationship between urbanites and homeownership (Yan 2008). These categories pattern with reported *shequ* policies: homeowners were not subject to home inspections, and urbanites did not have to register with the *shequ*. Rural migrants who are Uyghur, on the other hand, were under almost constant surveillance in Ürümchi.

Conducting a large, representative survey was impossible due to the political context. The following are some preliminary findings from interviews with 34 Uyghurs (see Table 4.2). For this section, I only coded and aggregated the data from the two main categories: urban *hukou* holders who owned their homes, and rural *hukou* holders who were renting.⁶⁰ The five outliers to this pattern, and the seven living in school dorms who have different *shequ* requirements, were not included in this section of the chapter. The collected main answers to the interview questions about the *shequ* are shown below (see Appendix A for a complete list of interview questions):

⁶⁰ *Hukou* is the Chinese word and *nopus* is the Uyghur word for “household registration” in Xinjiang, China. The household registration (*hukou*) system classifies Chinese citizens as either rural or urban and restricts welfare benefits to one’s place of registration. Thus rural *hukou* holders living in the city often lack affordable access to welfare benefits in the city, including subsidized housing, education, and health care (Fan 2002). There exists undeniable and profound institutional exclusion and systemic discrimination of rural migrants in the city through the *hukou* system (Solinger 2006; C. Chan 2012). For more information on *hukou* in China, see Chapter 7.

Table 4.2: Interview Results for Questions about the *Shequ* for Uyghur Research Participants

	Uyghur answers to the questions: How often do you interact with the neighborhood community center (<i>shequ</i>)? What kinds of tasks do you go to the <i>shequ</i> for?	
	Homeowners or living in their family-owned home	Renting from a landlord
Local Urban <i>Hukou</i>	(14 out of 16 respondents) About once or twice a year for health check-ups, immunizations, passport applications, or proof of residence forms	Not enough data
Non-Local Rural <i>Hukou</i>	Not enough data	(17 out of 18 respondents) About once a week for home visits and inspections, and every three to six months for temporary residence permit application.

The results in terms of class versus *minzu* requirements at the *shequ* are telling when compared with the Han interview data. First, consider the demographics of my Han interviewees (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Han Interviewee Demographic Information

Number of Han Interviewees Based on Socio-Economic Status Demographic Table			
	Homeowners	Renting or living on work-site	Living in the school dorms
Urban <i>Hukou</i> living in a Han-majority district	16	0	0
Rural <i>hukou</i> living in a Han-majority district	2	11	0
Urban <i>Hukou</i> living in a Uyghur-majority district	3	4	2
Rural <i>hukou</i> living in a Uyghur-majority district	1	4	2

I only include the interview responses from the people in the bolded blocks to show the variances in responses and compare them to the Uyghur responses. The goal is to give a general overview of the *shequ* for most of the people I interviewed, rather than a complete picture of every possible situation. The Han holding rural *hukou* but living in a Uyghur-majority district were also subject to house inspections and frequent registrations. It was still easier for them to register, however. I do not include those interview responses here because there were only four people

among my interviewees for that category. Nonetheless, Table 3.4 makes clear that *shequ* policies differed based on *minzu* and wealth as measured by homeownership and *hukou* status.

Table 4.4. Interview Results for Questions about the *Shequ* for Han Research Participants

	Han answers to the questions: How often do you interact with the neighborhood community center (<i>shequ</i>)? What kinds of tasks do you go to the <i>shequ</i> for?	
	Homeowners	Renting or living on work-site
Urban <i>Hukou</i> living in a Han-majority district	(14 out of 16) Almost never; I've never been there	
Rural <i>hukou</i> living in a Han-majority district		(9 out of 11) Every twelve to six months for a temporary residence permit; only need my ID and a very easy process

For 14 of the Han research participants, they had virtually no interaction with the *shequ* and had no opinions about it. An obvious difference in *shequ* experience between locals and migrants existed, as well as differences in experience between Uyghur and Han. The Uyghur responses when compared to the Han interviewee responses to the *shequ*-related questions exposed differences in *shequ* contact and harassment according to *minzu*. The main differences were the documents required for the temporary residence permit application, which both Uyghur and Han rural migrants in Uyghur-majority districts had to re-apply for every three to six months. The requirements for the Han were to go to the *shequ* with their national ID card. They described it as very easy. According to a *shequ* document, all non-local Uyghurs had to provide the following

every three to six months to obtain their temporary residence permit in the city of Ürümchi (see Appendix B):

1. ID (multiple copies)
2. First page of your *hukou* booklet (multiple copies)
3. Proof of employment
4. A guarantor that you are not a criminal must come in person
5. First page of your children's *hukou* booklet, children's vaccination booklet (they must have received all of their injections)
6. The landlord must come [to the *shequ*] in person
7. Marriage license
8. If you plan to register your children for school, the school must write, sign and stamp a letter saying "it's okay for this student to live in a rented house outside" (*Shequ* documentation recorded in August 2016, see copy of document in Uyghur in Appendix B)

While Han were encouraged to migrate to Ürümchi and even sometimes compensated with government subsidies for doing so (Dautcher 2009; Cliff 2016), the requirements for rural Uyghurs made it difficult for them to migrate to Ürümchi. While the *shequ* declared often that these requirements were for "security" reasons due to the 2009 and 2014 violence, it was clear that it was more about keeping Uyghurs, especially poor Uyghurs, from moving to the city. Many Uyghur rural migrants found it difficult to obtain these documents. It was also difficult to get the landlord to come in person, because they often lived in different cities. Providing proof of employment when they did not have a job, or they had informal work such as street vending or street hawking, was impossible. The *shequ* only had these requirements posted in Uyghur and not in Chinese. It was common knowledge that these requirements were only for Uyghurs. Take for example the following excerpt from a conversation with a close informant who was *shequ* worker in a Han-majority district about what happened when an unspecified minority tried to rent a house in their district:

If they were Han it would be okay, because Han only need their ID, *hukou*, and the lease to register. It's okay if Han are not from Xinjiang, or they have a *hukou* from somewhere else (*waidi*); it does not make a difference. But if they are a minority, then they have to get a guarantor and the landlord also has to guarantee that they are not a criminal, and they also need work papers,

and a health examination. So I prefer not to have minorities rent in my district, it's too much work. So technically they can rent, but it is a lot of trouble (*mafan*), so we prefer not to rent to them. I had to tell a minority family that had nowhere else to go, 'I can't let you rent here if there is no landlord to sign the guarantor papers.' So I told them, 'you can live in your shop and just not register and no one will know, but I can't rent to you.' (2017 conversation)

This process exemplifies what I call “bureaucratic dispossession” of the most vulnerable people in the city. Meanwhile the *shequ* workers admitted to the failures of human infrastructure, where registering minorities is too much work or too much trouble to do the paperwork. They also acknowledged intentionally “looking the other way” in condoning and allowing people to live in their districts unregistered. In other words, the neighborhood *shequ* was a level of governance where street-level bureaucracy was mediated by mobilizational fragmented authoritarianism.

B. For Your Safety, At Your Service: Textual Analysis of Shequ Documents and Government Propaganda

Another one of the main purposes of the *shequ* was to publish press releases, or other types of photos and messages about new policies. In the *shequ* documents, the term “public relations,” sometimes also translated as “distribute propaganda,” was termed 宣传 in Chinese. The first character, 宣, means “to announce” and the second character, 传, means “to propagate or transmit.” The characters together mean “propaganda” or “to give publicity to,” but is sometimes translated into English as “publicity” or “public relations.” The public nature of these documents allowed me to collect a rich archive of hundreds of materials published by the *shequ* or related government bureaus and offices during my fieldwork from 2014-2017. Propaganda from the *shequ* provided insight into how the Chinese state is publicizing *shequ* activities. Each type of *shequ* propaganda carried government rhetoric, whether through signage, notices, bulletins, letters, brochures, handbooks, or social media, and served a very specific purpose. Documents were published constantly. The categories overlapped, but for the purpose of organization, I found the following prevalent themes and repeating ideas across the different types government propaganda when

coding the data: First, “the terrorists are the bad guys, we’re the good guys.” Second, “we’re in this together. You are also responsible for taking on a role in constructing a harmonious society.”

This section on textual analysis serves two purposes. First, it provides insight into the rhetorical perspective of the government. Second, it shows that there is a gap between policy and practice. All the documents cited here were collected from public documents published and distributed by the *shequ*. Documents and bulletins were constantly circulated in my Uyghur majority neighborhood, but each *shequ* was different. New propaganda posters were set up every three months or so.

Scapegoating the problem and promising service, safety/peace, development, and construction. The government’s propaganda provided justification for limiting citizen freedom through tight surveillance “for your safety” that carried the narrative of “the terrorists are the bad guys, we’re the good guys.” One of the most common repeating phrase in the documents was “for your safety.”⁶¹ The government propaganda justification was that Uyghur Muslim terrorists were a direct and dangerous threat to society. The role of the *shequ* was thus to provide a safe and stable society through policing and security.

The *shequ* used this propaganda to establish that terrorists were a threat. Although a majority of the texts collected carried positive and enthusiastic messages about the benevolence of the government, the remaining texts carried messages warning about the dangers and consequences of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. The following announcement posted on a wall in the Uyghur-majority neighborhoods is one example of fear-based propaganda (see Figure 4.3). The announcement reads in Uyghur and Chinese, “Don’t start rumors, don’t believe rumors, and don’t spread rumors! In doing so, equally oppose and struggle against every type of rumor!” Rumor was

⁶¹ Ch: 为了你的安全

a label that the state could put on any speech act to give justification for arrest of a Uyghur. On the other hand, rumors were a socially useful tool for Uyghurs to help warn about upcoming policy changes (see also Chapter 2). In this way, any speech act could be seen as threatening to the state (see Dautcher 2009 on how the state labels “illegal religious activity” as a way to justify arrests of Uyghurs). The caption to the picture on the right with the criminal in front of a red “prohibited” sign in front of a computer, USB drive, and cell phone reads: “According to the law, let’s harshly punish those who start and spread rumors! It’s prohibited for anybody to use a computer, cell phone, USB drive, text message, microblog (Weibo), WeChat, etc. to start and spread rumors!” These kinds of posters and ideas later justified the surveillance of everyone’s phones and computers on a random and regular basis in 2017. The poster in Figure 4.3 is accredited to “Tengritagh District Solidarity Road Area Management Committee Zhongquan South Road *Shequ* Ürümchi City Business Federation ‘Visit, Benefit and Gather’⁶² Task Force Propaganda.” This combination of different offices is one sign of the complicated bureaucracy. I draw attention to the words of “management committee,” which point to the role of propaganda and “social control management” as part of the neighborhood governance infrastructure of the *shequ*. The bureaucracy of the *shequ* was explicitly tied to surveillance.

⁶² This phrase is translated from the Chinese acronym “访惠聚,” which is short for “访民情 惠民生 聚民心,” which can be translated as “Visit (understand) people's conditions and attitudes, benefit people’s livelihoods, gather (win) people's hearts.” The “Visit, Benefit, and Gather” taskforce is part of the official “social stability” (维稳) campaign.



Figure 4.3: An example of the kind of demonizing rhetoric around Uyghurs and terrorists that warned people of the *shequ* surveillance and punishments. The picture on the left features male and female Muslims as signified with their dress meeting with Han leaders about the issue, the middle picture has citizens signing their support of the stopping of rumors. *Source*: Photo of a propaganda poster by author, August 2015.

These messages of surveillance spread and supported by the local *shequ* were a tactic of territorial control through scapegoating and fear. The messages justified harsh punishments for ambiguous offenses and warned people that the *shequ* was carrying out surveillance of electronic media and would punish such “criminals” according to the “law.” Saying “according to the law” (Ch: 依法) was another key, repeating term to justify arbitrary punishments as a key part of the rhetoric in controlling cell phone content and electronic media. For example, other posters with a menacing closed fist carried messages such as, “According to the law, severely punish the violent terrorist criminals!” (see Appendix B).⁶³ Propaganda posters witnessed in Ürümchi during Fall of

⁶³ 依法严惩暴力恐怖犯罪, Uy: *zoravanliq terrorchi jinayet qanun boyiche qattiq jazalayli!*

2014 were distributed by the *shequ* and ubiquitous in the Uyghur enclave of southern Ürümchi in Tengritagh District. The posters carried messages such as, “Everyone, let’s strive to be anti-terrorist heroes!”⁶⁴ and portrayed Uyghur and Chinese police officers in collaboration with Uyghur “citizen” armies carrying clubs and patrolling the streets of southern Ürümchi. The posters were accredited to the “Ürümchi City Tengritagh District Social Management Administration of the Residents’ Committee Office” (see Appendix B). A rhetoric of safety and morality was associated with the *shequ* and police, while the antonyms of safety (e.g., terrorist, crime) were often couched in terms of religious extremism, which was undoubtedly associated with Uyghurs as Muslims.

A second key strategy of the warning propaganda was to couch a rhetoric of safety on either side of the warnings to stay away from illegal religious activities (see also Dautcher 2009). One booklet read, “Firmly stand in striking down obscene and illegal content and resolutely ban publications that entice minors to commit crime, engage in immoral sexual activities, violence, superstition, gambling and terrorism.” In another example, in a brochure in Uyghur published by the Ürümchi City Education Bureau and distributed by the *shequ*, titled a “propaganda handbook” for elementary and middle school, the reader was warned that “members of the school should not participate in evil cult organizations such as Falun gong, Ponzi schemes and preaching religion,” and the school’s responsibility to install surveillance cameras over 100% of the school was emphasized. Religious extremism was often mixed in with other associations of non-religious activities. In the midst of lengthy regulations on fire, traffic, and earthquake safety, one brochure suddenly declared that everyone must stay away from drugs, and “stay away from illegal religious activities and stay away from religious extremism.”⁶⁵ In many of the propaganda, rules about

⁶⁴ 人人争当反恐英雄, Uy: *hemmeylen terrorluqqa qarshi turush qehrimani bolayli!*

⁶⁵ Uy: *qanunsiz diniy pa’aliyetlerdin yiraq bolush, diniy esebiylikdin yiraq bolush*

safety and distancing oneself from criminals and drugs went side-by-side warnings and rules about “illegal religious activity and religious extremism,” often couched in terms such as “evil cults” (邪教). However, the specifics of what illegal religious activity meant was never explained in the documents I collected. Underground Christian churches in Xinjiang were also often subject to such measures as well.

After the scapegoating and demonizing, the *shequ* then swooped in to deliver safety, stability, service, development, and construction for the people. The remaining majority of documents carried positive connotations about the benevolence of the government rather than negative or fear-inducing messages. For example, one booklet titled “Peaceful Construction: Propaganda Handbook” published by Ürümchi City Peaceful Construction Leadership Working Group Office, described the procedures for becoming a “designated peaceful family” by showing a flowchart: “Families apply → work unit verifies → residents approved → public notice → *shequ* designates.” One of the qualifications of this honor was that your family has demonstrated “*minzu* solidarity and no *minzu* conflicts.” This flowchart exemplified the bureaucratic procedures of the *shequ*. The booklet then described ways to construct “peaceful districts, peaceful villages and townships, peaceful precincts, peaceful *shequ*, peaceful neighborhoods, peaceful schools, peaceful enterprises, peaceful work units...” The organization related the subliminal theme of the booklet—the police—with peace. The booklet described various money fraud incidents, concluding with, “Must report incidents immediately. Don’t panic when encountering incidents. Next time immediately call 110.” Through cartoons, the booklet portrayed the police as helpful and necessary members of preserving peace and security.

The following letter is another example of the repeating theme in the *shequ* documentation (see Appendix B). The letter created an image of the government as generous care-takers that are

only doing what was necessary to fight the “terrorists.” The letter was titled “A Letter Sent to the Resident Masses of Every *Minzu*”⁶⁶ and posted by the *shequ* from the CCP Workers’ Committee and the *shequ* worker’s committee⁶⁷ of my neighborhood in Chinese and Uyghur around the Uyghur-majority neighborhoods in January of 2017.

The people pray for calm and order, while chaotic⁶⁸ people thirst for turmoil. When a Eurasian jackdaw⁶⁹ flies, it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s winter. The will of the people is identical as long as we tightly hug together like the seeds of the pomegranate, and join forces to defend against external aggressors⁷⁰ and have anger against a common enemy,⁷¹ those few evil people will be detested by all like a rat crossing the street.⁷² Everybody shout to strike, there will be nowhere to hide! Let’s hold hands and join hearts in order to construct our beautiful native homeland, and work hard together!

This is an example of the common kinds of letters and notices that the *shequ* distributed to households, most often as notices pasted to walls around buildings or businesses in the neighborhood. The letter exemplified the way that the *shequ*, as a branch of the government, is clear in wanting to unite the people against the “enemy.” The nameless and unidentified enemy did not even need to be clarified as it was obvious to anyone in the region at the time that the “common-sense” answer to the so called “external aggressors” were what the government labeled

⁶⁶ Ch: 致各族居民群众的一封信, Uy: *Her millet ammisigha bir parche xet*

⁶⁷ 党工委, 工作委员会

⁶⁸ 乱 *luan*

⁶⁹ 寒鸦 *hanya*

⁷⁰ 守望相助 *shouwang xiangzhu*

⁷¹ 同仇敌忾 *tongchou dikai*

⁷² 过街老鼠 *guojie laoshu*, an idiom that means someone or something detested by all, or the target of scorn.

as “Uyghur terrorists.” Although not explicit, these “enemies” were Uyghurs. The letter did not stop there. It also included positive rhetoric about how the government is helping the people. This letter contained the keywords that were the main repeating themes in the *shequ* documentation: improvement of the people’s lives (民生改善), construction (建设), and defending society’s stability (维护社会稳定). These keywords helped create a narrative that the people need the government:

For a long time now, the autonomous region Party committee, city committee, and district committee from beginning to end put improvement of the people’s lives as every job’s starting point. Deeply improving the city district’s construction for the creation of the people’s livable environment, and defending society’s general stability allows us to have a feeling of safety. We can see the public transportation lines improving, new subway lines being constructed, measures to protect the environment, health physicals for all the people... All of these things without exception embody the concern and care⁷³ of the Party committee on every level as well as every branch of government has for everyone.

The government was portrayed as caregivers through the *shequ* as a community organization providing services such as health physicals, hoping to garner support through community member employment and participation. Through letters to residents such as these, they instigated the idea that the *shequ* is needed to keep them safe, and foster construction and economic development.

These documents shed light on how the government justifies what is happening with the limitation of citizen freedoms as outlined in the rest of the dissertation, and a glimpse into the government’s perspective. The propaganda attempted to help quell any unrest or resistance to the *shequ* measures that engage in tight, suffocating surveillance. Providing free medical examinations and immunizations was another method of *shequ* benevolence and care. Posters and signs advertising this service were distributed frequently across the neighborhood. These kinds of

⁷³ 关心关怀 *guanxin guanhuai*

welfare programs were meant to portray the *shequ* as a service and safety organization, rather than a branch of the government.

Meanwhile, the same letter acknowledged that people were not happy with the *shequ* activities:

Maybe you feel that so much construction has brought you a lot of unnecessary annoyance,⁷⁴ maybe you feel there are some practices that have harmed or neglected your rights,⁷⁵ maybe you feel that the days we enter your home in the middle of the night has interrupted your life a bit. But, you still are so understanding and supportive of us, you know deeply, that for the defense of our peace and safety, it's you and me together our obligation, to preserve stability is our hope and expectation. Health, peace, auspiciousness, and a prosperous home is our shared wish.

The author of this *shequ* letter recognized that people were at least annoyed by the interruptions of the social stability campaign (e.g., entering homes in the middles of the night for inspections). When people are not happy, a scapegoat is necessary. However, they admit that some of their actions in increasing security and construction have been less than favorable. The propaganda banners that were displayed across buildings and evicted businesses to make way for demolition also subtly acknowledge dissatisfaction: "Demolition and eviction is bitter for a moment, but having a new residence means fortune for life."⁷⁶ These messages portrayed an underlying nervousness on the part of the state because the presence of such messages in the first place suggested that people would be unhappy with the evictions and demolition. People should be grateful for the development that such construction brought, however, the messages declared.

⁷⁴ 麻烦 *mafān* Uy: *Belkim nurghun tedbirler sizge zorur bolmighan awarichiliklerni elip kelgendek hes qildingiz...Biraq, siz yenila bizni chushendingiz hem qollidingiz.*

⁷⁵ 权益 *quanyi*

⁷⁶ 搬迁过渡艰苦一时, 搬迁新居幸福一生, Uy: *Kochkende bir mehel japa tartsaqmu, yengi dewalghuga kochup bir omur bextlik otimiz.*

Sharing responsibility: We're in this together. The second major theme in the government propaganda was “we're in this together. You are also responsible for taking on a role in constructing a harmonious society.” For example, one booklet is titled, “it is necessary for the masses to collectively participate in preventing minors from violating the law and committing crimes.” One poster advertised rewards up to one million yuan for those who “revealed or provided leads on those who carry out violent and terrorist criminal activities.” The local government supposedly shared the burden of “maintaining social stability” with the people, and claimed that everyone was responsible for doing their part and had a role in creating a “harmonious society.” One *shequ* sign read, “Strengthen the Shared Construction of a Family Garden of *Minzu* Solidarity and Harmony.” The keywords in this theme are collaboration (共同), be civilized (讲文明), constructing a harmonious family garden (建设和谐家园), and *minzu* solidarity (民族团结). Such messages suggested that the people were responsible in carrying out the mission of *minzu* solidarity and harmony in order to reap the benefits of development.

Some other examples of *shequ* propaganda rhetoric told the people “*Minzu* Solidarity Is Every Nationality in Xinjiang's Personal Lifeline.” Another large sign read, “You exert yourself, I exert myself, together (共同) let's strive so that Ürümchi will establish a national civilized city.” Another sign read, “Let's firmly seize social stability and long-term governance and long-time peace as our chief goal.” Often posters portrayed Uyghurs as holding the Chinese flag or other symbols of Chinese nationhood or citizenship as a way to attempt to show that Uyghurs too support government policy. Take for example the following picture (see Figure 4.4). This photo encourages *minzu* solidarity and projects a collage of pictures of diverse people over the map of Xinjiang and says “we are all one family.”



Figure 4.4: A collage of pictures of people from different *minzu* on top of the map of Xinjiang from the National Civilized City campaign reading, “We are all one family.” The bottom right of the picture attributes the poster to the “Houquan Road North *Shequ* Workers Committee, Municipal Committee Propaganda Bureau, “Visit, Benefit and Gather” Task Force. The “Visit, Benefit, and Gather” phrase is translated from the Chinese acronym “访惠聚,” which is short for “访民情 惠民生 聚民心,” which can be translated as “Visit (understand) people's conditions and attitudes, benefit people’s livelihoods, gather (win) people's hearts.” *Source*: Photo by author, March 2017.

The propaganda attempted to garner community participation. By using inclusive rhetoric such as “collaboration” (共同), the propaganda strove to garner citizen stakeholders in the People’s War on Terror campaign. Such language encouraged spies by arguing that grassroots campaigns were needed against “terrorists” that might be disguised as ordinary neighbors, for example. Using documents and signs such as the ones discussed here, the government shared some responsibility with its citizens. The propaganda tried to gain citizen support and participation in the process of “citizen armies” where everyone was responsible for safety. This encouraged spying and mistrust between people, which led to a breakdown of societal glue and cohesion.

The public relations or propaganda duties of the *shequ*, illustrated concern about the threat or risk of social divisions. *Shequ* propaganda on a wall in the Uyghur-majority neighborhood publicized the *shequ* functions as both holding activities (活动) and security (维稳). The poster on the left reads, “*Shequ* Implements *Minzu* Solidarity Activities. The poster on the right reads, “Solidarity and Stability are Fortune; Splittism and Unrest are Disaster. Firmly Defend the Motherland’s Unification; The Flag Clearly Opposes Splittism” (see Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5: Photo of *shequ* propaganda on a wall. The captions below the pictures read: Left, picture of Han people with unidentified minority family in what appears to be a yurt: “*Minzu* Solidarity as One Family Relation.” Right, picture of police officers standing in a line: “Strength of the *Shequ* Maintenance of Social Stability.” *Source*: Photo by author, October 2016.

The propaganda documents give a different perspective from the interviews and observations that follow. They give a picture of both insecurity and fear, and at the same time an illusion of care and benevolence through development and construction. The documents suggest an attempt to garner local “grassroots” efforts and community participation. The bureaucracy and policing of the *shequ* work together to establish neighborhood surveillance. The hope is, perhaps, that community participation in spying and “constructing a harmonious garden together” will fill in the inevitable gaps of state power. However, the ethnography below reveals that attempts at such grassroots efforts at community participation in state power was unsuccessful. The propaganda reveals the spatialization of material state power where brochures are distributed and posters cover most public surfaces. Meanwhile, the ideological appearance of a unified state apparatus that is always watching is reinforced.

C. Perspectives on the Shequ: Irrational and Arbitrary Social Regulation: Awarichilik, Munasiwet and Heqiqe Yoq

One of the first words I learned in Uyghur was “*awarichilik*” (Ch: 麻烦 *māfan*). This word was a keyword amongst Uyghurs in Ürümchi and means “troublesome.” It was most often used to describe annoying and meaningless paperwork or procedures, and was also used as a euphemism for getting into trouble with the authorities (as in, “let’s not talk politics and invite/bring *awarichilik* to ourselves”). The *shequ* as an *awarichilik* and confusing process was one of the main repeating themes when coding informal interviews in field notes.

Awarichilik was also a keyword in the responses to the interview question, “Are you satisfied with the *shequ*?” was “No, because it’s *awarichilik*,” without elaboration (some chose not to explain what they meant).⁷⁷ The six who explained answered in ways such as the following:

⁷⁷ 20 others said “I don’t care,” and 5 of the 46 chose not to answer the question, and 3 shook their heads “No” in a way that indicated, “No, I’m not satisfied,” but did not say anything.

“They are the rudest people I have ever met, they are absolutely useless” (2016 interview). One man related the story of when his bike was stolen:

My bike got stolen out of the stairwell of my [gated *xiaoqu*] apartment complex. So I went to the *shequ* and told them. I asked them, “Can we at least look at the camera footage?” since we all know they have cameras everywhere. They just said, “No, we can’t help you.” [laughing] So I’m left wondering what the point of all those police are if they can’t help someone find their stolen bike, but whatever [laughing]. (2016 interview)

While the *shequ* maintained almost 100% coverage of public spaces with cameras, the state’s fragmented authoritarianism showed its face: Despite the spatial coverage with cameras, the failures of human infrastructure meant that the employees were unwilling to use that coverage to help in the case of a crime. For this participant, state power was fractured in that they cannot help him. As a result, this participant expressed his frustration with the uselessness of the *shequ* police. The *shequ* was a marriage between bureaucracy and surveillance, where the “social indifference” created by the bureaucracy resulted in failures of implementing safety or crime reduction. The participant experienced the *shequ* and the *shequ* police as irrational, and the state was encountered and experienced as fragmented and useless as well. Another participant said:

They’re just trying to do a good job and feed their families, but I hate going there because it’s so *awarichilik*: long lines, confusing process. They always say, ‘Can you come back later? Can you come back tomorrow?’ Then they tell you to go one place and do one thing—I think it’s just to get you to stop bothering them with questions they don’t know the answer to—and then you go and do that, but when you get there, the people there tell you to do something else. Then the next day they tell you to do something else, you need some other paper or signature or stamp they didn’t mention you needed the day before. (2016 interview)

The banality of state power affected people’s lives through the obstruction of daily tasks that were necessary to obtain residence in the city. Another young, male interviewee said, “If they keep our minds busy with other stuff, then we have no time to even *think* about politics, let alone talk about them. We are busy with *awarichilik* things instead” (2017 interview). This interviewee did something common in Ürümchi: He used an abstract “they”—not naming an individual, but rather

constructing the homogenous, all-powerful, strategically-minded “state” actors, where the ideological state became “real” for this participant. The state not only affected his daily tasks but also, according to him, what he thought and talked about. “They have a *shequ* for every square kilometer of the city. For some people, maybe this can be a benefit, they provide immunizations, for example. But to me it seems like a big waste of time and resources” (2016 interview). This participant commented on the spatial expanse of the *shequ*, but emphasizes that it was a “waste.” As another example, there were several radio programs on the Uyghur radio channels I listened to where people called in to ask “experts” about problems they were having with confusing bureaucratic issues: *hukou/nopus* issues, welfare, interpretation or understanding of new laws and regulations, conflicts with landlords or bosses, getting their children to register for school, or getting a driver’s or taxi license, for example. Here is an excerpt from my notes about one such radio program:

Today a woman called in, distressed and in tears, talking fast. She was saying she was calling from Hotan and some school official had turned her kid away from school for some reason. She said she thought it was related to the fact that she was from a rural Hotan county, but was living in the city of Hotan now.⁷⁸ She related a story about how they had re-directed her to several different places, but every time she went somewhere, she was turned away or re-directed. The radio announcer said, “Don’t worry, don’t be sad, because there’s no way that a school would not allow a child to enter.”⁷⁹ She said they would keep in touch and definitely get this order sorted out because it was impossible for a kid not to be able to go to school. She said she would get in touch with the proper officials in the city and make sure her kid got to school. (2016 field notes)

The state bureaucracy was a confusing and frustrating process for many people. Enough so that they had several radio programs a day dedicated to callers asking about these issues. These programs also served as a distraction from providing news. The other common program besides

⁷⁸ She did not mention the *nopus* explicitly, however, so it is unclear whether she or her daughter had a rural or urban *nopus*.

⁷⁹ Uy: *bala mektepke kirmisa bolmaydu*

music was a Q&A session with doctors, which partially reflected an interest in health and partially was a way for the radio stations to fill up time with something other than news and propaganda.

Gupta (2012) writes about bureaucracy in the Indian context, arguing that bureaucracy is a mode of inclusion and care that is nonetheless arbitrary, irrational and inextricably connected to state-sponsored structural and invisible violence. In Ürümchi, the *shequ* as a confusing and arbitrary bureaucratic process was indeed a mode of inclusion in the state that effects violence. In Ürümchi, red tape was combined with other more visible and obvious forms of militarized security whose function was to incite fear and control as a way to establish control and limit citizen freedoms. One method of state control was through requiring all residents to register at the *shequ* in order to bring everyone under the surveillance of the government. In the process, however, the confusion of the *shequ* bureaucratic red tape enacted equal levels of fear and control through the state violence of institutional discrimination.

After “*awarichilik*,” another keyword in the field notes and interviews was “*munasiwet*” (Ch: 关系 *guanxi*), which means relationships or connections. Having *munasiwet* was an important part of getting things done in the bureaucratic process. My interview participants were posed the question, “What kind of services does the *shequ* provide for you?” One young woman responded, “I get my registration done there because I don’t have a local *nopus*. But if I go there, I always try to bring a Han friend. If you do that, you won’t have so much *awarichilik*. That’s what Han friends are good for. That’s how I got my registration accepted and how I got my guarantor paper signed” (2016). In 2015, the *shequ* started requiring that Uyghurs without Ürümchi *hukou* obtain a guarantor to sign a paper saying that one is not a terrorist and they, the guarantor, would be held responsible if that person commits any crimes. The guarantor had to give a photocopy of their ID, their ID number, telephone number, signature, and sign with a fingerprint. This person had to be

someone with an Ürümchi household registration (Ch: 户口 *hukou*, Uy: *nopus*).⁸⁰ Many Uyghur participants told me that they would try to ask a Han friend to do this for them, though others reported that a Uyghur with an Ürümchi *nopus* could also sign the guarantor form. Using Han friends to help with the bureaucratic procedures indicated that people were resourceful in finding any loopholes they could.

Other Uyghur research participants often spoke of family members who worked at the police station or Public Security Bureau who helped them with getting papers signed or applications filled out (this experience came up repeatedly times in interviews and was also a common repeating theme in field notes). For example, one participant recalled an interaction when he was renewing his *hukou/nopus*: “I realized she was an old classmate of mine from middle school, and I asked her, ‘Did you go to this school?’ And she said, ‘Are you Muhemmet?’ and I said, ‘Yes.’ After that, everything was fine and she got everything taken care of in only 20 minutes [laughing]” (2017 conversation). Fragmented authoritarianism, where both the irrationality and fear of the state can be circumvented through the help of connections, was evident. The theme of a family member working for the government who might be able to help get someone a passport came up several times in the interviews: “I talked to my [older female] cousin about getting a passport. She said she’ll be able to help, but wasn’t able to give me any details” (2016 conversation). In another example, when I was looking for housing in summer of 2017, a friend offered for me to live with them. I protested, saying that I didn’t think the *shequ* would allow it based on my current visa status. She responded, “Who cares about the *shequ*? I’ll just tell them we’re living here ourselves and they won’t come check because we own our home. Besides my husband is old classmates and friends with their [the *shequ* employees] boss. It won’t be a problem” (2017 conversation). It was

⁸⁰ For more information on the *hukou/nopus*, please see Chapter 7.

clear that even though bureaucracy presents itself as rational, in the end having connections was often the best, and sometimes the only, way to get things done in an otherwise inaccessible process. State power in this case was fragmented in the gaps of the human infrastructure. Despite the bureaucratic dispossession that targeted the poor and minorities, people found ways to exploit the gaps in the process. While the *shequ* covered all material ground spatially, through connections with people, participants found ways to undermine the state's attempts to cover all ground.

In another example from summer 2017 when Uyghurs were not allowed to rent houses in the city, I was talking to a friend of a friend, who said he had recently moved. I asked him if he rented or owned, as the eviction of Uyghur who rented was a common topic of conversation: "They [the *shequ*] wouldn't have rented to me, but since I moved places within the same apartment complex with the same *shequ* manager, and he knows me, he just changed the house number in the system and everything was fine. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to rent in the city" (2017 conversation). Having connections was an important part of the irrational and arbitrary process of the bureaucratic *shequ* system. However, especially during the crackdown I witnessed during summer of 2017, *munasiwet* could not always help in every situation. I had a close Han informant named Li Tian who worked at the *shequ*. Our mutual Uyghur friend, Zohre, underwent a housing crisis in summer 2017 during the crackdown when she could not find housing due to the new policies that Uyghurs were not allowed to rent. One day, Zohre asked Li Tian if she could pull some strings to allow Zohre to live in her husband's *shequ*, which was located in the Uyghur-majority Tengritagh District. Li Tian said she was not sure and elaborated:

The other day in my *shequ* [in a Han-majority district], there was a family of six people comprised of five men and a two-year old girl. They got kicked out of their own apartment near Solidarity Road [in a Uyghur-majority district] because of the demolition happening there and they really had nowhere to go. I really wanted to help them, especially because literally had nowhere to go. But what was I supposed to do? They were five men from Kashgar! I had no choice but to give them the run around.

It was not made clear to me whether or not that family of six ended up living in Li Tian's jurisdiction or not, but from the way she was shaking her head and clicking her tongue, I guessed not. I asked Li Tian to clarify the situation, and in response Zohre's husband, who is Han, turned to me and said, "You wouldn't understand. Right now in our country everyone from Kashgar is being held under tight scrutiny right now." Zohre then turned and said to me in Uyghur, "We're like Black people in the US. It's the exact same situation. If you understand that, the you'll get this." In the end, Zohre and her wife ended up hiding out in her wife's apartment in a Han-majority district and stayed in Ürümchi for as long as I was informed of it.

The ability of people to circumvent the irrational regulations through connections revealed the state for them to be incompetent and less powerful. As a result, the project of revealing the state's power and control was often undermined by its own process. While the state at times appeared to be an ideological presence through surveillance and rules, as well as material presence through cameras and paperwork, actual encounters with bureaucracy and surveillance on the ground meant that the specter of the state started to breakdown as more fragmented than it might appear on the surface with the multitude of police stations and *shequ* buildings, not to mention the spatial expanse of the propaganda.

In addition to "*awarichilik*" and "*munasiwet*," another phrase often heard is: "*Hesib bar, heqiqe yoq*," meaning "true in word, but not in reality." Such a phrase aptly described the *shequ* in Ürümchi: In word, the *shequ* said that they were there for the service and safety of the people. But in reality, it was clear from the flailing of the *shequ* in its disorganized bureaucratic and indifferent procedures that its measures were not effective in either service or safety. To take an example from my own experience in summer of 2016 when I was getting approved for a visiting scholar visa:

We waited for Gulnur [the female Uyghur boss of the *shequ* police station] to show up to sign my new registration form and introduction letter. After waiting for 30 minutes and calling her repeatedly, he [the Han police officer on duty] forged her signature on my introduction letter and waved me out. (2016 fieldnotes)

This theme of “*hesib bar, heqiqe yoq*” further connected the arbitrary, confusing, and irrational outcomes to bureaucratic processes, as well as fragmented authoritarianism. Until 2017, many people seemed to find it relatively easy to circumvent the rules and regulations of the *shequ* and police for the most part. To take another example from my own experience with residency registration when a police officer asked me, “Did you already get a new blue card [for foreigner registration]? Because in the system it says that your card expired in 2016.” And I said, yes, I had gotten a new blue card since it expired eight months ago. I showed it and my visa to him, explaining this is what the Public Security Bureau gave me. He pulled up my file on the computer, the one where it had my picture, a picture of my passport, and all my information, including my address, cell phone number, and the date my visa expired. The database showed my visa and blue card had expired eight months prior. Clearly, they were not keeping *that* close tabs on me. Such blatant oversight only obviated the state’s poor surveillance and control. Human error was behind the state’s surveillance technologies. The lack of interest among *shequ* officials in the enforcement of rules presented “people as infrastructure” that fails (Simone 2004). People as infrastructure illustrated the human error involved in the state apparatus. Furthermore, the dynamics of inconsistency were not a disadvantage to the state. Instead, the effect of unpredictability alone produced a constant state of uncertainty. It was not just about the fact that such policies and procedures were obviously ineffective and inefficient. It was clear that it was an advantage to the regime for their people to be insecure and fearful. Confusion, uncertainty, and inconsistency was part of the strategy. Arbitrariness was a strategy for illiberal rule with an unknowable effect. In this way, the confusion was working as a mechanism of rule.

Some exceptions were made to rural *hukou* holders for a time up until summer 2017, who were sometimes still allowed to live in the city by obtaining a work permit from their hometown police station and *shequ* office. Here is an excerpt from my fieldnotes about one person who was affected by this change in policy. She had just returned to the city from her hometown where she was for almost 4 weeks trying to get permission to stay in the city:

I cried that's how bad it was. You know they required these things—letters, stamps, permissions to leave my hometown and work in the city—of me before, but this time they forced me to go back to [my hometown in a rural village] and get the letter of permission in person. Originally, they [the police at the *shequ*] would only give me leave from my hometown to work in Ürümchi for 2 months. But I cried and cried and I begged them to give me more time. So they changed it to July, the end of the semester, when I'll have to go back again. I couldn't believe it. (2017 conversation)

The irrational logic of bureaucracy was revealed when she got her date extended by crying at the police station. She also faced arbitrary outcomes because she had to go back to her hometown in three months despite the intense burden on her and her family. But no one at the office cared about that burden. Inclusion in the state, rather than exclusion, led to structural violence (Gupta 2012).

She showed me the papers, and had the copy of one of them, which she asked her daughter about (“Is this the one I give to my boss, or is it the copy I give to my boss?”). Clearly it was a bit confusing for her since she does not read Chinese and, as I sat there, she asked her daughter to explain to her what the papers meant. Her daughter translated the papers and told her mom which ones her mom had to give to her boss. She had a large stack of papers. She showed me one letter written in Uyghur with multiple signatures and red fingerprints, and two documents in Chinese. One was similar to the kind of document I had to get signed for permission to live off-campus and it was labeled on top, “People from the countryside temporarily living in Ürümchi work permit and registration.” Then she had her picture pasted below that. It needed a guarantor signature and phone number, signature and stamp from her *shequ* in her hometown, signature and stamp from

the police station in her hometown, and signature and stamp from the local *shequ* in Ürümchi. There was a second paper that said, “Registration for people from the countryside asking for leave to work in the city of Ürümchi.”⁸¹ And it was another list of phone numbers, people, signatures and stamps. She gestured and pointed at the papers and said, “Isn’t this ridiculous, I need all these *awarichilik* papers just so I can work at the place I’ve always worked at for years.”

Regulations were constantly changing and people were not sure which laws and regulations are applied and when. People, including the bureaucrats themselves, *just did not know*. Nobody knew what to apply for, how many stamps they needed, how long it would take. The process and outcomes of bureaucratic regulations were arbitrary and irrational, and it created a chaotic situation and experience of the state as both close and distant at the same time. Both situations encapsulated the structural violence of the caring and inclusionary state (Gupta 2012).

In conclusion, the *shequ* maintains tight yet incoherent bureaucratic and police control on Uyghur people (see also Reeves et al. 2014 on ethnographies of the state that describe this tension in other parts of Central Asia). The monitoring and restricting of migration is a way that the state is exclusionary. The state controls by fixing and monitoring people in space and place. But nobody, including the bureaucrats themselves, really knows what is going on. It creates a destabilizing situation by keeping people at a distance from knowing what is going on, so they are in a constant state of confusion and fear. The tighter the police and *shequ* regulators try to hold on, the more obvious their irrationality becomes. The *shequ* control is destabilizing, dispossessing, and violent, and at the same time flails, and in its flailing is violent. I describe how the arms of the state bureaucracy—from the *shequ* household registration regulations, to the police, to security guards, ID scans, and metal detectors at the entrance to every building— is a suffocating presence, yet

⁸¹ 乌市县常住请假登记表

distant in a confusing and irrational way. The administrative side of things is just one part. Policing and public security is the other branch of the *shequ* mode of control through less visible but still material ways.

D. Wider Political Crackdown of 2017: Shequ and Policing

In the beginning of September 2016, a crew of Han Sichuanese construction workers started doing construction at the street intersection outside of my apartment building. I thought they were working on the water or sewage system. A week later, a solitary two-story rectangular structure emerged practically overnight—standing alone like a squat fire hydrant next to the high-rises that surrounded it. What was it? A public bathroom? Then I started noticing similar structures being built every other block in my surrounding neighborhood. There were two being built within a five-minute walk (less than 100 meters apart) of one another on the north and south side of my apartment building. Winter, long and fierce in Ürümchi, was quickly approaching. Was it a winter shelter for the security officers on duty at every street corner? Rumors circulated quickly, and soon there was no doubt. The outsides were paneled with a gray and white pattern outlined in a navy blue, the obvious symbol of the police. A week later, signs were erected on columns at the entrance with vertically arranged characters reading: Ürümchi Crime Reporting Stations for the People’s Convenience,⁸² each with the same scrolling message on an electronic board at the top: “Social Stability, Long-Term Governance and Long-Time Peace.”⁸³ Each station had the national flag posted on top, and was decorated with both red lanterns and the Atlas design, a symbol of Uyghur culture (see Figure 4.6).

⁸² Ch: 乌鲁木齐便民警务站

⁸³ Ch: 社会稳定 长治久安



Figure 4.6: Picture taken next to the Erdaoqiao Grand Bazaar market in the center of Uyghur business district. The police station “for the people’s convenience” rests side by side with large advertisements in Chinese for “Hotan Jade” shops. *Source:* Photo by author, March 2017.

Contrary to suspicions and rumors that these were temporary stations, these were permanent offices, where 700 new police officers were hired in Tengritagh District alone for 4,000 RMB a month (a relatively high salary for Uyghurs, which made this an attractive job for many), to staff the new 24-hour police stations meant for the reporting of crimes or incidents in every 2-block radius. Each police station was associated with a *shequ*, and were meant to provide security and police support for the *shequ* employees who would be carrying out evictions of Uyghurs from their homes in the coming months. Each neighborhood store was equipped with a crime reporting device that alerted the police, and the police were expected to show up in under 60 seconds. Rumors also circulated that the stations would be equipped with free Wifi and beds, and were supposed to be havens of warmth where you could take a rest during the winter. Later I would

frequent them as useful public bathroom spaces as well. The stations always had umbrellas and wheelchairs available to give out. They were, after all, for the service and convenience of the people.

The implications and ramifications of the new “convenience policing” system, which came soon after the region’s new Party Boss Chen Quanguo came into office, were wide-reaching: new restrictions on freedom of movement and living for Uyghur rural migrants, new level of a military police state, affecting whether young Uyghurs choose to go to college by providing an attractive salary, and further Chinese territorial presence—the flags and red lanterns alone were clear national iconography. These Chinese state territorialization structures increased state infrastructural power, the security apparatus, and continued bureaucratic control, not to mention signifying both state power and Han culture. Meanwhile, the stations furthered the employment of Han construction workers and mainland Chinese construction companies, and Han and Uyghur police officers, contributing to the economy. As a material construction project, the stations further incorporated peripheral regions into the central state sector and national economy (Becquelin 2004; Cliff 2009; Woodworth 2012; Brox and Beller-Hann 2014). The stations also gave the impression of serving the people better through more “efficient” and “convenient” reporting of crime. These stations were establishing state infrastructure at the neighborhood level and changing the landscape (see Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7: Police stations started becoming more and more ubiquitous in the Uyghur neighborhoods as the year 2017 progressed. This police station is located near the iconic Grand Bazaar tower in Ürümchi. *Source:* Photo by author, April 2017.

In conjunction with these stations, the security state increased its reach on every street corner in Ürümchi, from police and military checkpoints and patrols, to tank patrols with sirens

and signs reading messages such as “Don’t be afraid to shed blood for victory,” or “War on Terrorism,” or “Ethnic Solidarity is Fortune,” or “Construct a Harmonious Xinjiang,”⁸⁴ multiple times a day, to propaganda, to metal detectors, to car and body checks, to locked gates around every building and alley entrance in the Uyghur majority districts of Tengritagh and Sayabagh.

Beginning in March 2017, the *shequ* employees in Tengritagh and Sayabagh Districts were responsible for carrying out a directive from the city government that minorities with rural *hukou* status were no longer allowed to rent houses in those two districts. Li Tian, a Han woman who worked at the *shequ* explained it to me from her perspective working in a Han-majority district in the north:

It’s just that Tengritagh and Sayabagh Districts currently have an order from the city government that minorities can’t rent homes. So minorities are starting to come running to our District, where we don’t have that order. It would be best if they don’t rent in my district because it means a lot of extra work for me. So I tell them, if you have any other way to rent, do that. If they have no other option, then I will do the paperwork for them. It’s just a lot of extra work and I don’t have time for all that.

For example, I had a minority come and try to rent a house in my district, but the landlord needs to guarantee they are not a criminal. But their landlord is in the Inner Provinces (*neidi*), so he couldn’t come and sign the guarantor papers. So I had to tell the minority, there’s nothing I can do (*mei banfa*). (2017 conversation)

The following is an example from a public WeChat conversation in Spring 2017 that a Han and Uyghur woman had about the situation. The Uyghur woman had posted on her public WeChat “Moments”⁸⁵ the message: “Sometimes I hate my own identity...I’m from Xinjiang’s Hoten and I’m Uyghur [frowny face emoji].” In WeChat Moments, people could then comment and reply to such status updates, where people such as myself could read and reply to the conversation.

⁸⁴ 不怕流血牺牲;反恐战争;团结稳定就是福;建设和谐新疆

⁸⁵ 朋友圈 *pengyouquan*

The image of the conversation in Chinese is in Appendix B. The conversation reads in English (A is Han and B is Uyghur):

A: Is your *hukou* also from Hoten? Big Xinjiang right now is getting more and more laughable.

B: What's up, Big Sister?

A: My friend is a minority and their *hukou* is from Hotan. They're working here [in Ürümchi], but were rushed back to Hotan.

B: I had moved my *hukou* here, but my original census registration is from Hotan, so right now renting a house is extremely difficult. At least the place where I work doesn't care about *hukou*.

A: Then it's fine; this city doesn't restrict *hukou*.

B: Renting homes is restricted. I've been looking for a house for half a month now, as soon as they hear I'm a minority, they immediately just won't rent it to me.

A: Oh boy, that's the way it is. With the *shequ* arrangement, if they rent to a minority, there's a penalty fine.

During Spring 2017, Uyghur rural migrants lived in constant fear of getting kicked out if they were renting. The red tape and policing arms of the *shequ* exemplified techniques to control occupied territory.

Oh God, there is no work for us at home, and there is no freedom there either, no space to breathe or live at home, so we come here [Ürümchi] and start a life and send our kids to school, but then they make us leave to our hometowns for the letter. We go back for the letter, but they don't give the letter. So what are we supposed to do? We can go nowhere, we are stuck, we can't go home, and we can't live here. They are so crazy!⁸⁶ Especially with this ridiculous letter stuff, it is getting out of control (2017 conversation).

States control by fixing people and things in place and keeping track of populations by knowing where people are located. In Ürümchi, bureaucratic administration, including services and

⁸⁶ *Sarang!*

propaganda, along with policing worked together to evict poor minorities from the city. The *shequ* and government was focused on controlling information and controlling the narrative.

These quotes provide an illustration of policing of movement and spread of information, in addition to confusing bureaucracy and fearful policing that exemplified arbitrariness of ideological and material state power. We see this in liberal governments too, but in liberal states there is some limit on state power. In these examples, we see few limits on state power. The state effect as ideological and material creates significant barriers and obstructions in people's everyday lives where poor minorities faced forced evictions.

My Han research participant Li Tian provided an alternative perspective. One day at dinner later, she randomly blurted out to me:

You know, I really love my country. I really love it. You know all of the policies are put in place to serve the people (*wei renmin fuwu*). They really are made from good intentions. Even though my job is hard and thankless, I still want to be a good representative of my country and do a good job serving the people, and help them also love their country, and trust and believe in their country through my good work. I love my country and I was to represent and serve my country, and help people have hope again. The policies come down from above and we are the ones who are supposed to implement them, and we are the ones on the ground actually talking to the people and trying to get things done. So we are the ones who get blamed for the policies, but actually there is nothing we can do about it and we are just doing our best.

While the *shequ*'s discourse of care and safety might have satisfied the Han population, for Uyghurs the *shequ* policies were seen as only a violent and discriminatory process of displacement. Meanwhile, the *shequ* employed large numbers of otherwise undereducated and unemployable young Uyghurs and Hans, which was key in securing at least temporary stability in the city and keeping large numbers of young Uyghurs under the surveillance of the state sector. Although the state employed large numbers of Uyghur community numbers in an attempt to bridge state and society, they were ineffective in garnering support or increasing satisfaction towards the state among Uyghur residents. But perhaps that was never the goal. The *shequ* increased state

infrastructural power, capacity to regulate social life, and state presence in the everyday lives of rural migrants, especially Uyghurs, in poor neighborhoods in Ürümqi.

E. Evictions and Incarceration

“Yeah and it’s not like there are no available houses. A lot of houses are empty right now, they are having a hard time finding renters, it’s that they [the *shequ*] won’t let us [Uyghurs] live here” (2017 conversation).

“Yup, a lot of our neighbors have already been forced to move away. One on the fifth floor, one on the second floor, and one on the first floor already moved back home because the *shequ* wouldn’t let them live here, and now the houses are sitting empty” (2017 conversation).

The records of migrant registrations especially enforced since 2014 enabled the state to tighten control through demolition of minority homes and businesses, and evictions of minorities from the city. One day in 2017, Rizwangul called me, so I invited her upstairs to drink tea in my living room. The first thing out of her mouth, instead of the more common standard greeting, was instead, “Oh my God, the policies⁸⁷ keep getting more and more tight, you know?⁸⁸ The pressure is so heavy for all of us these days. A lot of people I know who went abroad are getting sent to re-education camps. My boyfriend was sent back to his hometown as well. It’s really bad” (2017 conversation). I was not surprised as this is what everyone had been telling me during that month. “Luckily I’m living unregistered at my sister’s apartment so it’s been no problem. The *shequ* doesn’t check. I can stay in Ürümqi with her,” she told me. While we were chatting, she suddenly sent a few voice messages into her smart phone, saying to someone, “Oh my God, I’m so happy to hear from you, thank the help of God for bringing you back home.” She looked up at me. “It’s my friend who was thrown in jail, he’s back now.”

⁸⁷ In Uyghur, *veziyet*, an abstract and vague term that referred to government policies that was commonly used to describe the “situation.”

⁸⁸ Uy: *chingip bariwatidu dengeeeee*

“What was he thrown in jail for?” I asked

“I have no idea,” she said, rolling her eyes, throwing her hands up and shaking her head.

I heard stories like these on a daily basis that summer. It became normal. One day in May 2017 when I was sitting with Guljennet and Muqeddes in their home, a woman I did not recognize came in. Her hair was pulled back in a bun with a light pink, translucent headscarf tied loosely around the back half of her head. Her yellow sparkly shirt with an Etles theme was draped over a large pregnant belly. She was breathing heavily as she had just climbed several flights of stairs. She was carrying a bag of bananas in one hand and a watermelon in the other. Guljennet shrieked and excitedly embraced her, explaining to me that the stranger had just come from their hometown and this was the first chance they had to meet. “She lost her first child,” Guljennet explained to me. I didn’t know what to say, so just instinctively said in Uyghur, “What a pity, be patient,”⁸⁹ the only polite response to such news that I knew. They nodded. A while later, curious because the policies were getting so strict with new migrants coming from places like their rural hometown, I asked, “How long are you planning on living here?” and she said, “I want to give birth here and then go back. But the *shequ* aren’t giving us [Uyghurs] houses⁹⁰ and they are making everyone leave.⁹¹ I need to get that temporary residence permit, but without the letter [a security clearance] from [my hometown], they won’t give me one” (2017 conversation). At that time, the *shequ* was monitoring temporary residence permits and household registrations for adults and children. The residence permit application was a bureaucratic process that included getting a letter of permission

⁸⁹ Uy: *Bek epsus, sewr qiling.*

⁹⁰ Uy: *oy bermeydu*

⁹¹ Uy: *ketkuziwatidu*

to work in the city, which cleared one of criminal charges, from one's hometown. However, it was not only an economic burden for people to make the long travel (often a 24-40 hour trip) back home to obtain the letter, but also that often the letter was impossible to obtain. The bureaucratic process dispossessed the poor and discriminates against poor migrants working in the city, displaced many back to their hometowns and restricted the right to the city to those with money and resources to obtain the letter. I witnessed the violence of state bureaucracy as the two women discussed the displacement of many from the city. Later in the conversation, Guljennet said:

“The lady responsible for our *shequ* lives on the fourth floor of our building!”

“Oh, that's kind of uncomfortable, isn't it?”

“Yeah, when I see her, I just say, ‘How are things going with my documents?’ There is a family on the fifth floor with five kids, the last two don't have official *nopus* [because they were born outside of the family planning policy regulations]. I asked the family, ‘Is that okay with the *shequ* person living as our neighbor?’ and they responded, ‘As long as they aren't the police, it's okay!’”⁹²

The *shequ* function by employing community members and neighborhood residents, which enhances the surveillance in the apartment buildings. Guljennet attempted to get her documents taken care of, but as she indicates, it took many months. They also indicated their dissatisfaction with the *shequ* by complaining about the discriminatory policies and undue burden on migrants who want to live in the city. They also talked about the ways people hide from the police or do not register their children, as well as their strategies for circumventing the rules. Bureaucratic dispossession of the Uyghur people from their land and livelihoods occurred not only through the burden and confusion of paperwork that required stamps and signatures from the Chinese system, but also through the spatial reach of the *shequ* into people's private lives and bodies, affecting childbirth and pregnancy. Bureaucratic dispossession affected their location in space through a

⁹² Uy: *saqchi bolmisa boleweridu*.

systematic and calculated removal of poor Uyghurs from the city by using the surveillance, and records of people's locations to control their location and movement. While the fragmented authoritarianism remained, the holes became harder to make and find as 2017 continued.

The *shequ* also enforced laws on a local level, not only birth control and residency, but also working age. Not only did they check homes, but they also did inspections on all the shops. The spatial spread of the *shequ* seeped into everyday life that felt more like a suffocating blanket as 2017 progressed. For example, Muqeddes tried to get around the working age regulations by pleading her 13-year old employee's case:

I had already told the *shequ* and had an agreement with them that I was helping her because her father had died and I wasn't giving her a salary. But, of course, I'm going to actually give her a salary to help feed her family! So then, the stupid girl, goes to the *shequ* and told them the truth! She told them, "Yeah, they give me a salary. Yeah, I'm 13-years old." The *shequ* said she can't work at my shop anymore because she is not 16 yet, and she should go to school. So she said, "Ok I'd like to go to school, I will go to school." So now she's out of a job, and how is she going to support her mother? Her mother can't afford to send her to school. I'm not saying that studying is a bad thing, I think it's important to go to school. But when you don't have a dad your options are limited. (2017 conversation)

Bureaucratic regulations fabricated social order through arbitrary rules that were inclusionary and violent. People did their best to avoid and ignore the regulations. The violence of state bureaucracy was one tool in restricting access to resources and enforcing the unequitable distribution of resources, namely jobs, housing, schools, and hospitals in the city for the most vulnerable. *Shequ* power was spatial: *shequ* workers were people's neighbors, and *shequ* buildings were located in or near apartments and homes to further the reach of the state into people's everyday lives. The *shequ* controlled people location and mobility through paperwork, as well as police inspections of homes and shops. They enforced control and order by evicting poor minorities from their homes in the city. Meanwhile, the tools to circumvent *shequ* power were also spatial: people hid in the corners in order to escape eviction.

These vignettes and quotes illustrate pervasive state control as well as loopholes around the regulations. First, people feel the state effect: The material and ideological control of state presence and surveillance in their lives, complain about it, and show their resentment towards it. Regardless of the actual law on paper (which guarantees complete religious freedom) and enforcement of various rumored or actual laws, state control is subjectively experienced in Xinjiang. Second, the police seem to be at least somewhat effective in enforcing some aspects of state control, where the spatial aspects of the *shequ* as furthering the reach of the state into people's homes and controlling their mobility. Third and finally, the contradiction between the law (i.e. residence permits are required), what people are saying about the law (i.e. *awarichilik*), and actual practices on the ground (i.e. arbitrary, irrational, and violent) is also important. The state was at the same time both distant and arbitrary, while close and fearful.

F. Mistrust: "They Say, 'Go Ahead and Have that Stuff'"

The conditions of distancing and confusion created mistrust. As part of the *shequ*-directed "maintaining social stability" (*weiwen*, 维稳) campaign since 2009, every business with a certain number of people was supposed to have metal detectors at the entrances to their business, and every apartment complex (*xiaoqu*) was supposed to have locked gates with FOB keys. Every apartment complex was also to have at least one security guard at the entrance checking the trunks of every car that entered. And yet, as the months passed, people started walking around the metal detectors, leaving the *xiaoqu* gates open, and not checking the trunks of cars. Here is a quote from one interlocutor:

It's kind of a funny joke, if you think about it. Like a bad movie. Or maybe a very, very funny movie. Trust me, they're all confused. They don't even know what's going on. They're just dancing around. First it was the metal detectors. Now, no one really cares or pays attention to those. Did you notice how the security guard didn't even stand up to do a body check on me when I entered the bar this evening? Then it was the neighborhood magnetic gates—which no one cares about anymore and everyone just keeps them open. Then it was that every car had to

be inspected before entering—my taxi the other day didn't even have to open its trunk and that was in the middle of the night. Then it was checking the IDs everywhere you went. Then it was the police checking your phone everywhere you went. Everyone is confused. (2017 conversation)

The chaos of the state bureaucracy was evident through the confusion and the tighter regulations and surveillance of the *shequ* that was experienced at the same time as both close and distant. State bureaucratic control was at once both a source of close surveillance—and thus, resentment—of the local population, and at the same time the frustration and annoyance of bureaucracy obviated its facile control (see also Mbembe 1992 on jokes and ridiculing of state power). Through its inefficient policing and primarily useless efforts at control, the *shequ* revealed its distance for everyone to witness first hand. The ineffectiveness of state control through the bureaucracy showed that the state was not one concrete and reified unity, but disaggregated and fractured. The more the state tried to enforce stricter regulations, the more obvious it became that they were flailing at anything except for fueling fear and resentment. They were undermining legitimacy in their attempt to increase control. However, perhaps legitimacy was never their goal. As a colonial power, they were focused solely on power and control of an occupied territory. Furthermore, the human error that formed the state's surveillance technologies shows “people as infrastructure” that fails (Simone 2004).

Modes of security and control that were ineffective on the ground were effective in fueling fear and resentment. Consider the following example from a quote from one of my interviewees who had told me how she had thrown out her prayer mats:

They say, “Go ahead and have that stuff [religious paraphernalia such as prayer mats],” but if they find it, they will interrogate you, “Who taught you how to pray?” If you don't say anything, then you will get in some trouble. But if you do say something, then they will arrest the person who taught you. So, it's better to just get caught without anything. (2017 conversation)

She touches on the way that there is a gap between policy and practice: on paper, religious freedom is legal and enforced in China. But in reality, having evidence of religious activity, such as prayer

mats, was not allowed as she reports. Restrictions on religious activity were enforced and controlled through inconsistent and confusing rules and regulations, where people did not know what was legal and what was illegal. It was unclear how much regulation the Hui were subject to, but it was rumored that the Hui were allowed to keep their religious materials. In other studies on the Hui, they experience religious persecution in other parts of China as well (e.g., Lipman 2006).

Consider the following fieldnote for more insight on how the bureaucracy affected people's lives and how Uyghur experienced state control. On my way home, I stopped to pick up my scarves at the dry cleaner. The older lady who often mended and tailored my clothing—with puffy eye bags, wrinkles, and sagging skin but a bright smile, blue eyeliner and flowered headscarf—greeted me with a smile and a hello. She got up right away and went into the back to retrieve my scarves and brought them back to her table. After making small talk, the tailor then said to me:

We feel so much heavy pressure in our life right now, especially in taking care of our kids and their education, and especially for traders (*tijaret*) like us, the job is hard and the business is very poor right now. Security checks (*tekshurush*) have increased and gotten more strict, for example you can see in the Big Bazaar they have really cracked down hard on the traders there, and are not letting them do business there. This kind of environment will give you a feeling of heavy pressure every day and all the time having these *tekshurush*, it's really not good for your mental health to have this kind of pressure from the government, no freedom at all, and safety checks all the time, it has affected our business too. It really affects us (*tesir korsitidu*). This time of pressure and surveillance can cause all different kinds of diseases like high blood pressure. (2017 conversation)

The state effect on the level of the market and body generated the stress that was affecting her and her husband's health, as well as their business. In these examples, significant actual and rumored Chinese state control exists over Uyghurs' everyday lives: from not being allowed to grow a beard to restricting the number of kids you can have. The state restricted headscarves and Muslim caps, restricted Uyghur residency in the city, and prohibited the ownership of religious artifacts, Uyghurs frequently complained about state restrictions on their freedom. From comments about “they are so evil,” to “this is a funny joke,” to “this is negatively affecting our health,” it was clear that many

people were dissatisfied with the *shequ*, and that the *shequ* created confusion, fear, resentment and mistrust.

III. Conclusion and Discussion

According to my fieldwork, there are two convergences and two divergences between *shequ* in Xinjiang and eastern China. First in terms of similarities, I found that the *shequ* implement a method of *attempting* to increase state infrastructural power and capacity to regulate social life specifically in poor neighborhoods in both regions. The *shequ* in both regions focus on attempting to regulate residency of rural migrants. The existing research shows that the *shequ* has been successful in increasing control, but unsuccessful in increasing public participation or approval of the government (Heberer and Göbel 2011). I also found that the *shequ* did not increase public or grassroots participation. Second, in terms of similarities, the *shequ* in both regions recruit local neighborhood residents and community members to work or volunteer at the *shequ* (Read 2012). The *shequ* is an important employer in the city of otherwise under-employed young people, especially Uyghurs. The *shequ* provides a small level of economic stability for young populations, a type of economic support that is perhaps maintaining some stability or fabricating social order for the government in the city (Neocleous 2000).

In terms of differences, the *shequ* in eastern China are an attempt to make the state less visible in some ways through a rhetoric of democratic participation and self-governance. In contrast, the *shequ* policing in Ürümchi seems to be an attempt to *increase* state visibility and state surveillance. Second, while in eastern China, Read (2012) found a majority of the survey respondents in a poor neighborhood in Beijing supported and approved of the RCs, my experience taught me that the *shequ* organizations, as well as the employees of the *shequ*, are disliked by many people. In short, in Ürümchi the *shequ* appears to be an attempt to increase the visibility of the

state control of social life through bureaucratic and administrative ways of regulating residency in poor urban neighborhoods by employing local community members. Still, the bureaucracy is a part of invisible state control through monitoring and displacing or fixing populations in space and place. Third, in Ürümchi, *shequ* levels of control were correlated with *minzu* and wealth. The *shequ* was active in its administrative and security arms in Ürümchi. In other Chinese cities, the *shequ* is more about social services than bureaucracy and policing (Tang 2012). The philosophy of the *shequ* in Urumchi differed from eastern China's "control the poor, but let the rich have more freedom" philosophy in the sense that it was based more on ethnicity than wealth. The *shequ* was the implementation of a method of controlling the poor and minority populations, especially poor minorities.

Heberer and Göbel (2011) argue that *shequ* governance is an example of the state reinforcing its power by "regrouping" the state's central power. The *shequ* is a tool where the state reduces its more visible power, but reinforces its power in less visible ways through (self) discipline, public participation, and self-governance (see also Bray 2005, 2008). The *shequ* in Uyghur city districts in Ürümchi is not an attempt to make the state less visible, but rather the *shequ* in Urumchi is a technique to make the state more visible. In doing so, the state as bureaucracy shows its face in multiple ways: as employer, as protector of the people in service and safety, as regulator of spatial and temporal aspects of mobility, as a big brother of surveillance and security, as bureaucratic annoyance, as territorial and infrastructural control and presence, and as the frightening police. The materialities of the *shequ* exhibit to the residents that the government is an active presence in the neighborhood. The material presence is created and enforced through visible surveillance techniques through cameras, police, and also the micro-governing and bureaucratic or administrative control of the registration process.

The *shequ* as local bureaucratic offices and police served as key sites of encounter between citizens and the state. The fear and confusion of bureaucracy allow for the limitation of citizen freedoms, which result in a mutual lack of trust between the *shequ* employees and the neighborhood residents. This chapter highlights the spatial dimensions of the congruency and incongruency of the state through infrastructure and territory of neighborhood *shequ*. The *shequ* certainly maintained spatial reach through cameras and home or shop inspections that felt suffocating as 2017 progressed and people felt more and more unsafe in their homes as people were sent to internment camps. At the same time, the incongruency of the state is revealed in the ways people found loopholes around the regulations by hiding. In either case, state power restricted mobility.

The state is operating in Xinjiang through bureaucracy and public security to create a Chinese territory in a minority region. The material effects of the *shequ* and police stations, through paperwork and police station construction, encroach on spaces of autonomy and limits citizen freedoms. The fear of the *shequ* affects the way the state is perceived and imagined in both ideological and material spheres. The territorial representations and practices of the neighborhood *shequ* and police revealed the state to the people's imagination to be illogical, but nonetheless very powerful and violent. Through the bureaucracy, the state was able to be known as an institution, as a thing out there existing in the world, while at the same time revealing its chaotic and disjointed character, which revealed the cracks in the container of state territory. While there was a pervasive feeling of surveillance, threat, and arrest, still the research participants expressed here not knowing when they were watched and what was illegal. I illustrated the ideological and material aspects of the state, and how society functions and interacts with the state not as separate spaces but as constantly overlapping spaces that are interacting and constituting one another. Even though the

state lost its legitimacy, with heavy-handed oppression in economic, cultural, and military spheres, they were still able to maintain inhumane control.

This chapter also concerns knowledge: not knowing what is illegal and what is going to happen next. While people express fear through not knowing, the bureaucrats also are confused about the process and what policies are changing. While the state presents itself as a rational actor through scientifically-based bureaucracy that is designed to be efficient and logical, it was through encounters with the state bureaucracy that it revealed its irrationality.

INTERLUDE

September 2016: Today I went to visit Guljennet and Muqeddes in their home for language exchange. Guljannat⁹³ and I frequently giggle about the fact that she is my same age, 27 years old, and yet we lead entirely different lives. She is a mother of three, and I have never been married. Guljennet is short and chubby with tan skin scattered with dark pimples. She lives with her three children as well as several nieces and nephews in a tiny, one room apartment. Since Guljannat is the only family member not working because she is still nursing her youngest, she is responsible for most of the cooking and cleaning for the entire family. One family member is her aunt, Muqeddes,⁹⁴ who is a divorced mother of one and tailors clothes for a living. She can often be seen giggling and speaking softly in a husky voice to multiple different men on her WeChat.

Today Guljennet greeted me enthusiastically with a big smile, kisses on both cheeks and a warm hug. She wore a white counterfeit “Chanel” headscarf with black flower designs wrapped around her hair. She directed me to sit on a decorated mat (*korpe*) on a raised platform in the middle of the room. Soon after I arrived, she turned her attention back to her daughter’s homework, and wearily addressed my questions about her severely ill mother.

I wondered if I was helping or hurting by also asking after her own health, as it seemed she became forlorn in answering the questions. When I asked her, but how are *you* doing? She put her head down exhausted, and seemed almost too tired to talk, speaking slowly with her eyelids drooping. It was 2 pm and they hadn’t eaten lunch yet. When her daughter complained that she was hungry, “My stomach is open to starvation!”⁹⁵ Guljennet snapped back, “I don’t care! We’re doing homework” in an angry tone, slapping her daughter on her hand and ordering her to erase the math problem.

Before too long Muqeddes came in and prepared lunch, frying up and seasoning liver with cumin on the firey coal stove in the corner of the room, setting out a table cloth on the carpet, and placing the huge plate piled high with liver and nan to eat with chopsticks. The youngest kids were hungry, and they gathered around and eagerly and quickly stuffed the fried liver in their mouths. The kids over 13 years old were more hesitant and polite, insisting that I eat more than them. The huge pile was soon gone. She also prepared noodles, and when she was done cooking and everyone else had eaten, Muqeddes sat down with a big sigh of relief and exhaustion, slurping the noodles quickly and ordering me loudly to eat. Guljennet ate too, pausing occasionally to reach down and deposit chewed up noodles or bread into her youngest son’s mouth.

She apologized for not having studied the English I had taught her last week, explaining she had been busy caring for her mother at the hospital. She asks me if I know any good doctors and if, since I know them, they would be willing to see her mother at a discounted rate.

⁹³ Guljennet means “Flower of Heaven” in Uyghur.

⁹⁴ Muqeddes means “Sacred” in Uyghur.

⁹⁵ Uy: *qosqum echip ketti!*

CHAPTER 5

IGNORING THE STATE AS REFUSAL AND SURVIVANCE: THE BODY AS TERRITORY

“Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside your skull” (Orwell 1949, 26).

Despite the fear of police that people lived with daily, the most striking part of living in Xinjiang occurred during moments of pleasure within an otherwise oppressive and anxious situation. In moments such as joyful laughter, playing music, dancing, eating, drinking, or smoking, I witnessed the simple comforts that allowed breathing amidst the suffocation. To leave out these moments when people escaped state power would miss half the story in understanding Xinjiang and state power. I found in these moments that there is both freedom and escape, as well as fear and avoidance through survivance. I chose to use the word survivance instead of resistance in order to avoid perpetuating the power/resistance dichotomy (Mitchell 1990).

People negotiated the material and structural violence of the state as best they could by escaping in physical and psychological ways. For example, the gates and security checks exemplified the material and symbolic aspects of state power and territory that served as constant reminders of China’s presence and power in Uyghurs’ everyday lives. There was at the same time both blockage of Uyghurs and trespassing by Uyghurs.

In addition to the metaphor of the gate, I use the word “bubble” as a metaphor for these spaces of escape because the opportunities to breathe were often fleeting and fragile. Sometimes

these bubbles were physical spaces, such as the home or coffee shop. These bubbles were fleeting and fragile in the sense that, for example, the police could barge in at any moment. Sometimes these spaces were mental bubbles of escape, such as dreaming about moving abroad or consuming alcohol. These psychological bubbles could be punctured at any time. For example, when someone's passport was confiscated, or when someone woke up sober the next morning, their dreams to go abroad or attempt to forget their troubles ended. Nonetheless, people escaped frequently and found or created space to breathe amidst the chaos and pressure. These bubbles of escape or reprieve from oppressive state power have existed in many other contexts as well. For example, these bubbles were also called inner-emigration (German: *Innere Emigration*), a term to describe people living in Nazi Germany who spiritually left an oppressive state when still physically present because resistance was not an option. Research about inner-emigration during Nazi-era Germany, especially among writers, refer to inner-emigration as “flight of fantasy” or “culture during dark times” (Donahue and Kirchner 2003; Hermand 2013).

People often ignored the rules and regulations of the *shequ* (Chapter 4). In other instances, sometimes these spaces of escape were made out of desperation to put food on the family's table. I also observed other forms of numbing through alcohol and other forms of consumption.⁹⁶ Another mode of escape was through leisure, such as going to dance clubs. Other escapes to state

⁹⁶ As mentioned in Chapter 1, alcohol consumption, a cultural tradition for secular Uyghur men in Xinjiang, is an obvious and visible contradiction with their strict adherence to only eating Halal food, a contradiction everyone was aware of, acknowledged, and joked about. For many Uyghurs in urban Xinjiang, drinking alcohol was acceptable as long as one was not involved in the sale of it. Rural areas were more conservative. Nonetheless, alcohol was popular among many secular Uyghurs in the urban areas in which I lived. According to people I talked to, refraining from or giving up alcohol was a recent development among older and rural populations as accompanied by other burgeoning forms of increasing religiosity in the 2000s. It was only since 2017 that reports emerged of forced alcohol drinking by the state as a way to denounce Islam. It was a form of escape but not necessarily of rebellion or contradiction with their Muslim beliefs.

power were found in ethno-religious practices, such as fasting during Ramadan despite orders from government organizations not to do so. State territory was not discrete nor constant, but rather dynamic and in constant tension and interaction with multiple forms of spatial production and social relations. I found survivance, refusal, fear, and precarity constituted the social relations of state control in Xinjiang. I interpret these moments and spaces of escape as survivance. The term “bubbles,” “refusal,” and the term “survivance” were not terms that my research participants used. Rather, those are terms that reflect my interpretation of the data.

I build on Byler’s (2017) concept of embodied refusal in Uyghur men’s music as drawn from the analytic of “refusal” developed by Simpson (2014). McGranahan (2016) utilizes Simpson’s concept of refusal in the Tibetan context to better understand the disjunctures between formal and informal citizenship. In Ürümchi, the culture of escapism was a coping mechanism in reaction to a settler colonial state’s culture of elimination as a type of lived citizenship (see Chapter 3 for more on the theory and analytic behind refusal and lived citizenship).

The bubbles as spaces of escape to breathe were moments of pleasure and survivance in the midst of fear and distrust of state power. Drawing on Lyons (2010), these moments of pleasure were a silent agreement that one makes with repressive power only when there was no choice in the matter: “There was an assumption that Indian [frontier] space was inherently resistant...guided by tricksters” (Lyons 2010, 18). The Uyghurs’ homeland was also seen by the Han as a frontier space, a “tricky” gray area of uncertainty that challenges the territory of the nation-state. The bubbles in this study represent a fluid frontier zone that bump up against the imagined community of the nation. In my work, I found survivance through bodily and cultural practices of the Uyghurs. Uyghurs engaged in practices of survivance during everyday life in a repressive police state. Uyghurs constituted new and contested scales of territorial control through temporary spatial

formations that attempted to re-territorialize space for themselves and their families through cultural performances.

Within the spaces of the bubble, the body regained agency and control over a physical space, such as the home, for a moment. In other instances, the bubbles occurred *within* the body and the mind. To build on Chapter 4's story about coercive state control, I answer the research questions: How do ethnic minority citizens in China respond to state power in their everyday lives? How does fear, pleasure, and mistrust play a role in constituting the social relations of territory? Understanding the daily practices of creating bubbles as spaces of escape illustrates the material and ideological state effect. For example, the state may seek to inspire fear, but pleasure becomes a voluntary reaction to cope. Uyghur cultural performances at scales of the body and household reflected affiliation with the Muslim world that disrupt the national Chinese imaginary. The first empirical section focuses on wealthy Uyghurs and is divided into the following themes: numbing, homeownership, consuming leisure, and English lessons. The second empirical section focuses on poor Uyghurs and discusses the marketplace of informal economies, ethno-religious practices, and business practices.

I. The Body as Territory

Rather than simply an outcome of geopolitics, embodied practices are the sites of key disruptions of spatial control. In the empirics that follow, the body can symbolize loyalty or disloyalty to Uyghur ethno-cultural identity. Feminist geography is particularly useful when looking at identity, body, and scale. For example, wearing the headscarf and fasting during Ramadan for Muslims in China represent territory at scales of the body and household.

I explore authoritarian state-building from the perspective of territory and the body (Christian, Dowler, and Cuomo 2016). Some scholars have noted that when people, especially the

political or intellectual elite, cannot be overtly political because nationalist identities or affinities are suppressed or silenced, people in positions of relative power in the suppressed society turn to the policing of religion and women's bodies (Mayer 2012; Wemyss, Yuval-Davis, and Cassidy 2018). Recent feminist scholarship on identities in borderland and contested territories (e.g., Smith 2017) raises an important question: How is agency imagined and narrated through bodies in closed discursive environments on the margins of the state? Examining this question in the context of Xinjiang, China, this chapter extends recent work on feminist geopolitics by understanding the body as territory (see Chapter 3 for more theoretical details).

After coding the field note data, it became clear that there were significant differences between the coping mechanisms for wealthy and poor Uyghurs. Intra-Uyghur class inequalities reinforced the creation of these spaces of escape by showing the differential access to them based on wealth. People escaped the suffocation of everyday life and ignored the rules of the state by turning to the following spaces and practices: 1) Spaces of Escape for the Wealthy, where people found coping mechanisms in the home, leisure spaces, and dreaming to go abroad, and 2) Spaces of Ignoring for the Poor, where people resorted to illegal marketplaces for cash income and ethno-religious practice for eternal salvation. In the first section of empirical evidence below, money buys comfort. In the second section, people seek livelihoods in risky ways out of desperation, and look to Islam as the highest authority wherein state authority is ignored. Uyghurs were active agents in seeking out coping mechanisms and ignoring the rules. In doing so, they constituted territory by taking back some control over the space and time of their bodies, even if that meant psychologically escaping with a cigarette or alcohol when physical escape was impossible.

II. Spaces of Escape as Survivance for the Wealthy

During the investigation into the social relations that constitute territory, I found examples of three different kinds of “escape” from state brutality for the wealthy: 1) Physical spaces of escape in the home, 2) Physical and psychological spaces of escape in leisure, and 3) Psychological spaces of escape in English lessons. These three kinds of escape worked together to provide people with space to temporarily exert autonomy. People relied on multiple modes of survivance under an otherwise suffocating military and police surveillance state.

A. Home as a Physical Space of Escape: Fearful Hiding and Futile Inspections

Similar to the gate metaphor in the introduction, state regulations and their enforcement were a symbolic reminder of Chinese state territorial control, yet they lacked effectiveness. State surveillance through gates, cameras and home inspections served as a material aspect of the state effect that instilled fear and fueled distrust. Within this context, the home sometimes served as a temporary sanctuary from state surveillance (see also Blunt 2005; Dowler 2013). Nevertheless, the home as a “bubble” was easily punctured by the police at any time. The home as a temporary and fragile refuge illustrated the fear of state terror and the coping mechanisms for managing that fear. The state bureaucracy pervaded everyday life by monitoring tenants, which perhaps served as a more symbolic than practical mode of control and fear. Many people recognized the impracticality of attempting to monitor all tenants, and circumvented surveillance, found loopholes, and disregarded the rules and regulations. Nonetheless, fear pervaded:

July 2016: We heard a knock at the door and Munewwer⁹⁷ got up to answer it. I stayed in the living room, which was behind a wall and out of sight from the front entrance way. “Hello, I’m from the *shequ* and here to check on your registration,” I heard a male voice say in Chinese. My heart pounded in my ears and I quickly gathered my notebooks containing Uyghur language lessons into my backpack. Grandma Goherbanu⁹⁸ rocked the sleeping baby swaddled in the cradle. “How many people are in your family?” again came the Chinese voice in the hallway.

⁹⁷ Means “Remarkable” in Uyghur, a common woman’s name. All names are pseudonyms and all names used are common Uyghur or Arabic names.

⁹⁸ Means “Treasure” in Uyghur.

“Three,” Munewwer answered. “Ok, let me just check the registration,” I heard the voice say and I could hear the beeps from his scanning device on the QR code. “Alright, everything looks fine. Just remember if you have any guests, they need to come register with us.” “Sure thing,” came Munewwer’s reply. I heard his footsteps descending the stairs outside as the door shut. I breathed a sigh of relief. Munewwer came back in the room. “Thank God Erkin⁹⁹ didn’t cry,” she said, and started laughing. Munewwer’s baby, Erkin, was born outside of the state family planning policy and other people, including Grandma Goherbanu, were living there who were not registered. “What happened?” asked Grandma Goherbanu, who does not speak Chinese.

The *shequ* inspections reminded Munewwer and her family of state control and power. They intentionally incited fear rather than executing substantive surveillance. Because the inspector did not enter the home, inspections served as material (e.g., the QR code) and symbolic, yet hollow, state power. Although seemingly an exercise in futility, these inspections created a culture of fear and distrust. As a result, residents continued to ignore the regulations out of fear. For many people, the process of registering and running the risk of not getting permission was scarier, riskier, and more stressful than hiding from the police. A culture of fear encouraged mistrust where reducing contact with the *shequ* and avoiding government officials was favored over following the rules (see Chapter 4 for more on the rules of registration requirements).

An interaction such as the one Munewwer had with the police in her home was normal and common. When I initially coded the data, I labeled those incidents as “moments or spaces of freedom or resistance,” because things such as Munewwer’s laughter, which was also common, suggested that there was nothing to worry about in breaking the rules (see also Fluri 2019). However, upon a closer look, I recognized such incidents and spaces as fearful hiding as much as it was moments of autonomy. In fact, the fear of the police and *shequ* encouraged people to avoid registration and people preferred to hide. Besides Munewwer’s family, six other people told me that they did not register with the *shequ*. They avoided discovery, for example, by staying silent

⁹⁹ Means “Freedom” in Uyghur.

when they knocked and not answering the door, an avoidance tactic that depicts the existence of fear.

In addition to the evasive strategy of either not registering residents or not answering the door when the *shequ* inspected, they actively ignored how invasive and fearful this process was by pretending that everything was okay, and dismissing the fear and stress of the frequent home inspections into their home and family lives: “It’s fine! I’m not registered with the friends I’m currently living with and the *shequ* has never found me. When they come, I’m either not at home, or in the bathroom, or in a back room,” one friend insisted. A discrepancy between being afraid and not being afraid existed. Anxious fear certainly lurked underneath the surface, but people brushed it off. People often insisted that these home inspections were “not a big deal.” Pretending that they were not afraid functioned as an equally important mode of escape as hiding or ignoring the registration rules. Despite their nonchalance, these bubbles of escape and home inspection situation were precarious. Nonetheless, both avoiding the *shequ* and pretending the home inspections were “no big deal” exhibited a survivance strategy in an environment where there was constant pressure of getting caught breaking the rules.

While the *shequ* inspections created a culture of fear, the Uyghurs created a culture of ignoring and escaping. For example, even though we all knew that it would be dangerous and illegal for me to stay overnight at Uyghur friends’ homes, especially if they were renters, they always inevitably invited me to sleepover as a common courtesy (*qonup qalmamsiz?*).¹⁰⁰ The contradiction between fear and ignoring exemplifies how state territorial control is a fractured

¹⁰⁰ “*Qonup qalmamsiz?*” or “won’t you stay over?” was a polite invitation of hospitality that was expected when someone was leaving the home or saying goodbye. Some close friends took me up on the offer when it was late—many of my Uyghur friends felt safe in my home, believing that the police would never inspect it because I was at the time not a person of interest to the police. It was also sometimes a polite way to say, “Well, this meeting is over now.”

social relationship. In choosing reduced contact and avoidance over following the rules, the people demonstrated agency in ripping holes in the net of state territory.

Besides not answering the door or hiding when the *shequ* came to inspect, people also had a special knock when they came to visit friends. I learned to recognize the obvious knock of the friend versus the *shequ* employee when I first knocked on my neighbors' doors and scared them:

I went over to Amangul's¹⁰¹ [my neighbor in the same apartment building as me] house to tutor her daughter, Eqide,¹⁰² in English a few days ago. I had knocked loudly to ensure that they could hear me. Nobody answered. Today when I went over, I knocked as I normally do by pounding loudly on the door. "Who is it?" came a voice from inside. "It's me," I responded. Amangul—her hair perfectly permed in a round halo above her head, make-up expertly applied making face white, her lips red and eyebrows dark—opened the door laughing and embracing me with hugs and kisses. "You shouldn't knock like that!" she scolded me. "We thought it was the police at first. We always knock like this," she explained, tapping one knuckle softly on the door three times. "Oh!" I said, laughing. "I didn't know. I always just knocked like that." She hit me lightly on the shoulder, rolling her eyes and shaking her head. "You're going to scare people to death like that. It's impolite. Knock lightly with one knuckle three times," she explained again. No wonder my Uyghur roommate had not answered the door last week when I had forgotten my key and was pounding on the door.

From then on, I noticed that every time I was in a situation where Uyghurs were knocking on other Uyghurs' doors, they always used the three soft, single-knuckle taps. They told me that knocking softly was used out of politeness and they never described it as a resistance or even an avoidance technique. Whether it was out of politeness or avoidance, it served all of us well. The *shequ* inspectors created a culture of fear and surveillance. Stress and fear often invaded the home and stripped away a sense of peace. As a result, the locals chose to avoid contact with the *shequ* as much as possible, which created a culture of distrust on both sides. In this case, the knocking was about both escaping and fear, where the state was an interloper in everyday lives and people did their best to avoid it. Although the purpose of settler colonialism was elimination and erasure, the

¹⁰¹ Means "peaceful flower" in Uyghur.

¹⁰² Means "loyalty" in Uyghur.

state's tactics of policing produced a culture of protecting, escaping, and fearing. The state created a new culture of survivance with spatial characteristics: managing new spaces of temporary escape became normal. The spaces of fear and escape intersected.

Uyghurs at least somewhat successfully maintained distance between themselves and the state, creating bubbles of temporary relief from fear of state surveillance. Especially for people who worked for the state, or worked for the *shequ*, the home sometimes served as a temporary and autonomous refuge. However, it should be emphasized that these spaces were not discrete and bounded, but overlapping. The *shequ* overlapped with many of the bubbles. One young woman said to me:

I don't know what I'm going to do because the *shequ* won't allow me to stay here [in the city]. I haven't gone to the *shequ* to ask personally, and my friends haven't gone either, but it's no use. It doesn't matter that I work at a hospital, they're not allowing any new migrants from Kashgar into the city. I've been here for three months now, and I'm used to it. I'm just staying with my friends and hoping that they don't check my house. I'm looking to buy a house because maybe they will let me stay here if I buy a house. I don't know, but I'm going to try.

Despite this young woman's courage, this anecdote reflects fear and hiding, as well as coping and refuge. Many recognized that the inspections incited fear more than surveillance, and they chose avoidance to cope. However, fear permeated every interaction with the *shequ*. Avoidance out of fear and necessity encapsulated the resident experience. Meanwhile, hiding encouraged and perpetuated Uyghurs' social and physical location on the periphery of the state and society, marginalized and unable to secure legal residence. Examples of seeming to not notice, or be numb to, or "used to" state presence ("I'm so used to it," or *konup kettim* was a common response), showed up in my field notes again and again. The normalization of these overlapping spaces of negotiation between control and agency indicates fragmented authoritarianism in material and ideological spheres, as well as the role of the home and body in manifesting the overlapping spaces of state and society.

Aynur¹⁰³ explained to me how residents avoided the *shequ* employees. I had warned Aynur, who lived in my neighborhood, a few days before the following quote that there was a lockdown, search and inspection of every home at my apartment complex:

Since you told me about the check (*tekshurush*) at your place, we were ready here and we were expecting it. They did the same thing to us a couple hours later, not letting us leave or come into our apartment complex (*xiaoqu*) for a few hours last night. My daughter and I were outside the *xiaoqu* at the time, so we went to sleep at a hostel [chortling with her eyes wide staring at me, and then rolling her eyes and shaking her head] because I never registered her at the *shequ* of my dad's house, where we're staying now. I was really scared. We used to have the prayer mats and *the book* [Quran] at our house, and we were keeping them in the basement for a while, but we ended up throwing everything out yesterday.

The material objects and cultural artifacts associated with Islam were increasingly marginalized and then disappeared. In addition they slept in a hostel, which was a transient and temporary space. Thus, space became fractured and unstable. Within the escapism existed multiple levels and different types of fear. In Aynur's example, we witness transitory space and homelessness, as well as the disappearance of material cultural artifacts. Thus, fear changed the very character of this person's space. This illustrates two different types of fear and surveillance: both of home and living spaces, as well as religious objects. Meanwhile, Aynur exercised her lived citizenship by finding a way around the restrictions on her daughter, where she refused to be evicted from the city as long as she was able.

Bubbles were not strong shields, rather delicate and could be popped at any moment. They were not bubbles of freedom. They were bubbles of avoidance and fear. The bubbles were also transitory, hostile spaces that Uyghurs were forced to occupy during temporary homelessness. In each of these stories and quotes, hiding or avoiding the *shequ* at all costs was involved. Inspections

¹⁰³ Means "moonlight" in Uyghur.

established the material and ideological relations of the state effect that constitute state territory. Social relations of mistrust and fear established state territorial control.

People were scared and they would rather avoid the *shequ* and police at all costs than follow the rules. In their fear, they enacted practices to avoid the state's surveillance. Although the "People's War on Terror" that fueled and justified these invasions of privacy was an extreme circumstance, these social relations of futile inspections and fear of surveillance reflect broader patterns of state territorial control. In so doing, the nation-state as a marginalizing systematic structure harms minorities. The futile home inspections also evidence a disorganized and fragmented state comprised of multiple actors.

State territory is constituted in material and ideological ways: through gates, police presence, *shequ*, surveillance tools, and fear. The fear, hiding, and distrust are just as much a part of state territory as are the physical gates, police, and cameras. Power and control of space is secured through the ideological and material social relations of state territory. Meanwhile, the hiding reinforced Uyghurs' position on the periphery. The control worked not just through fear, but also through how the fear became so internalized that it became normal. The control was enacted by eliminating cultural artifacts and interfering in domestic spaces that destroy people from the inside out by merging state and social spaces.

B. Consuming Leisure as Escapism: Coffee shops and Dance Clubs as Physical and Psychological Spaces of Escape

Leisure spaces such as the coffee shop served as physical and psychological bubbles of escape, which illustrate a measure of agency over one's time and location in space through pleasure and inner-emigration. Leisure spaces functioned as unequal modes of survivance amidst suffocating state bureaucratic and police presence: the poor could not access these spaces. Expensive leisure spaces were also tools in reproducing the existing power relations by placating

the ruling class and creating material divides between classes. Leisure spaces marketed for Uyghurs were decorated with Turkic, Muslim, or cosmopolitan décor in a way that helped one forget that they were in China, which might also have been a tool of control through pleasure.

Unlike the home, fear was relatively more absent in these relatively public social and market spaces:

March 2017: When I walked into the Turkish coffee shop today, I felt as though I was attending a romantic and gluttonous party. The menu featured coffee mochas with towering whipped cream, a delectable selection of 12 different flavors of ice cream, and extravagantly ornate chocolate tiramisu cakes advertised as “Turkish desert” that towered behind the glass. Uzbek music blasted a little too loud on the speakers, and people spoke loudly to be heard over the music, creating a buzz of laughter and chatter all around me. I saw a couple feeding each other bites of cake. Teenagers sat together, not talking, but viewing their phones with intense concentration and typing vigorously. Two girls in gray turbans tied in the front of their foreheads sat in a corner sharing a pot of tea and giggling softly. A group of middle-aged men wearing square skullcaps (*doppa*) sat in a circle the middle of the room, multiple tables pushed together, talking loudly and laughing boisterously with each other. Another woman sitting alone with a red headscarf and an iPhone 6S adorned with shiny rhinestones, face plastered with white foundation, and a thick, dark penciled-in unibrow, sent voice messages into her phone as she ate a piece of strawberry cake. The din of people’s laughter and stories mixed with the music like a melodious harmony—a song of love, friendship, and pleasure, a short burst of time in the midst of busy lives. When I listened in on the conversations, I noticed that they never broached the religious or the political, and the kids were speaking in Chinese to each other. The friend I was with took a selfie of us with our two bowls of ice cream. She airbrushed my pimples and the bags under my eyes, made our skin instantly whiter, put it together in a collage that said ‘best friends’ in English, and posted it on social media.

These spaces of consumption and leisure were a way of creating distance from state terror by forming bubbles of enjoyment and pleasure. Drinking tea with friends in Turkish-style coffee shops was a prominent feature of life for Uyghurs who could afford it. The coffee shop served as a breath of fresh air from the pollution, traffic, busy work schedules, and police that enveloped life in the rest of the city. However, similar to the home, there was no escaping the material infrastructure of the state security presence, which was obvious as soon as one left the coffee shop. Gulba Xikar might have given the illusion of freedom for the price of a coffee, but the fear and state effect nonetheless was a major part of social space and social life in the city. Inside the coffee shop, people were able to construct temporary bubbles of peace through social relations of their

lived citizenship with others. At the same time, the self-policing of the supposedly free body in the form of editing social media posts also occurred. As mentioned in Chapter 2, self-policing also occurred when it came to social media content that could be interpreted as religious or political. Within the coffee shop space, which was supposedly about free expression and escape, there was mediated representation of the space through social media. Outside of that transitory moment, there was no way to ultimately be “free” because even in that space, people were still policing themselves and policing each other in social and cultural ways. The space was not really about freedom. Furthermore, spaces provided pleasure that exercised a type of bodily sovereignty:

If sovereign power originates in excessive and exceptional violence that wants nothing or sees nothing beyond its own benefit or pleasure, its object, but also its ultimate resistance, is found in the simple life of bodies that desire nothing beyond itself and the simple moments of pleasure of everyday life. This [is a] fundamental embeddedness of sovereignty in the body...Sovereignty resides in every human being and shows itself in the desire to enjoy and revel in brief moments of careless freedom. (Hansen and Stepputat 2005, 13)

Gulba Xikar coffee shop provides an example of pleasure, and the ability and desire “to revel in brief moments of careless freedom” as significant acts of power. The relief from experiencing state violence punctured state territory. These performances of in-group recognition were enacted through “sovereign landscapes of belonging” (Makley 2015, 452) in the home and businesses. While fear may be relatively absent, the material and ideological aspects of state territorial control (“[the conversations] never broached the religious or the political, and the kids were speaking in Chinese to each other”) were unavoidable in the end.

Expensive leisure spaces were decorated to serve as an inner-emigration in spirit from China. Social relations and moments of pleasure challenged the violent control and create spaces of escape from the net of state territory.

June 2017: While typing in a coffee shop today, a large air conditioner about five feet high sat in the middle of the room, keeping the room cool and protected from the oppressive summer heat outside. Slow, warm jazz played in the background and signs on the wall reminded me in English

that, “Life is not about waiting for the storm to pass, it’s about learning to dance in the rain.” Stylish and decorative lamp shades hung from the ceiling, surrounding incandescent bulbs. The ambient music and soft lighting created a calm and relaxed atmosphere. The many outlets on the wall made it convenient to charge one’s many devices. On the white plaster walls with spackle were blue words written in English and going in random directions—vertical, horizontal, upside down—saying things like, coffee, espresso, Bologna, Decaffeinated, Mocha, Cappuccino, and Coffee Milk. On the far wall were several framed pictures, saying things like “hot coffee” with illustrations of coffee mugs on plates with tiny spoons and sugar cubes, and of flowers and pianos. Two girls sat at one of the four-person tables, with their textbooks, notebooks, water bottles, and pencil cases splayed out across the table. Two tall glasses with a dark red juice sat between them while they chatted in Uyghur and occasionally stopped to read passages in Russian, stumbling and speaking awkwardly, occasionally stopping to bend over and write something in their notebooks.

The air conditioning, music, lighting, and decorations provided an escape not only from the summer heat, but also from the stress and busyness of city life, as well as Chinese culture and the police. Luxuries such as coffee and juice were classed privileges, and also perhaps a “necessary” modes of escape. Uyghur businesses provided spaces that illustrate new ways of understanding the spatial relationships of state territory through pleasure and escapism. Practices of consumption also highlight alternative spaces of cultural identity, such as the decorations in English that disrupted territorial imaginations of homogenous Chinese state space. The reproduction of classed barriers to access these coping resources also existed.

Escapism through consuming leisure occurred in spaces that were decorated to appeal to the cosmopolitan desires of the consumer.

April 2017: When I arrived at the club, I went through the metal detector, opened my purse for inspection, and underwent the body frisk by the female security guard who pats me down from under my armpits to my thighs. Ahead of me in the lobby stood a wall of wooden shelves separated into square cubbies, each holding a different bottle: Skyy, Ballentine’s, Grey Goose, Bacardi. Inside the music pulsed to an electronic beat.

Adil was wearing a shirt that said, “Istanbul: The City that Never Sleeps.” I followed him into the dance club. The room was pitch black except for the colorful neon lights and disco balls flashing and rotating around the room at a dizzyingly fast pace. Uyghur music was booming from the surround sound speakers at an ear-splitting volume and the bass beat was thumping so loud the entire room seemed to vibrate. In the stage’s background were several Greek-style columned pillars and a soft red light illuminating them. On the two sides of the stage were

Roman-style statues of people holding trays of flowers. On the far right and left inside the walls in the foreground of the stage have a huge built in display case with four-foot tall matryoshka “nested” Russian dolls.

The remaining three sides of the room were lined with two stories of tables encircling the dance floor and surrounded by plush booths, where Uyghurs sit smoking cigarettes or hookah, drinking Red Label Jack mixed with iced tea, and eating *dapanji*, Big Plate Chicken, a Chinese Muslim Hui dish, made with bone-in chicken, potatoes, and spicy peppers and cumin that I can taste as we walk by. A few women were wearing stylish Arabic style turbans tied in the front of their heads, or headscarves that are loosely tied around the forehead to show the front two inches of their hair.

Performers emerged periodically to dance on the platform. First, a pair of women dressed in traditional Uyghur dance costume performed traditional Uyghur dance. A little while later, two Uyghur women emerge dressed in Indian costume, dancing to Indian music in traditional belly dance form. Lastly there is a Uyghur in short white shorts and a long flowing gown that drags behind her like a wedding veil, which she whips seductively around as the audience catches glimpses of her bare legs while salsa music plays in the background.

An American techno song comes on, and the club patrons flood the dance floor, dancing what in Uyghur is called “disco,” which for them means American wedding free-style dancing to Western pop music. Next, the song changes to Uyghur music and the floor floods again with people dancing *ussul*, Uyghur style dancing.

This vignette illustrates the cosmopolitanism of Uyghur businesses, and the way they often used foreign goods or a foreign atmosphere—like smoking hookah, listening and dancing to American music, drinking Jack’s Red Label, and watching Indian and Russian dancers—to attract customers. Leisure spaces, as well as drinking and smoking, served as escapes from the stress of modern city life and the anxiety of police in Xinjiang. These spaces were only available to those who could afford them. Second, there was a blend of different cultures all while trying to seem or feel like both a Uyghur space and a non-Han space. The drinking of foreign liquor, smoking hookah, dancing to techno, and the Indian dancers indicate the customers’ interest in and acceptance of foreign culture even when it was non-Muslim. The smoking, drinking, and provocative dancing at the dance club exemplified an element of rebellious escape from the ethno-cultural norms of Uyghur Muslim society as well. Despite the religious restriction, and Uyghurs’ very strict Halal

diet, many Uyghur men smoked cigarettes.¹⁰⁴ Smoking and drinking signified an escape from traditional Uyghur society, a type of double escape from the repression of the state and ethno-cultural expectations. Take for example the following excerpt from a conversation with one queer-identifying female participant:¹⁰⁵

Why do I smoke? It's a type of freedom. It's a moment where I can say, look I'm going to take this time for myself. It's a way to say, "look, I don't care right now. I don't care what you think, and I don't care what it's doing to myself or to my health. I'm going to live in the moment." I live my whole life surrounded by pressure from the government, control from the government about what I can and cannot do. But nobody can control or stop my cigarette smoking and I won't let anybody take that little bit of freedom I do have away from me. When the government is always putting restrictions on me, I can't go certain places or do certain things, and can't get a passport, because I'm Uyghur, and there are a lot of my freedoms being restricted, then smoking is my way of not being restricted. Society also restricts what I can and cannot do too: "Don't drink, don't smoke, don't have sex," they say. So smoking, and drinking too, are my little rebellions, my little self-expression, something I can do on my own that no one can stop. Everybody does something not good, and smoking is my thing. To tell you the truth, I don't want to live to old age. I would rather live a good, short life than a miserable, long one. That's why I smoke and drink sometimes. I don't really care what it does to my health, to be honest with you. I don't care if I die early because of it.

The social relations of state territory are constituted by the symbolic and social spaces of escape that are not tangible, but ephemeral and temporary moments that disappear like a cigarette slowly dwindling away. There is power in saying, "I have control over when I live or die and no one can take that away from me," an exercise of refusal through lived citizenship. Although this is a far cry from suicide or self-immolation, as Makley (2015) has written about in the Tibetan context, I

¹⁰⁴ Straight Uyghur women rarely smoke, and even abstain from casually smoking at parties. Many of the Uyghur lesbians I knew—both male and female presenting—did smoke regularly, however. This may be a related but different dynamic pertaining to being outside of mainstream society and not caring about their image in front of others as well as not investing in their health due to other social exclusions based on sexuality, as well as a persona of coolness in the face of insecurity as well.

¹⁰⁵ Although it was uncommon to see both Han and Uyghur women smoking, it was a common and important part of lesbian culture to smoke. Being a queer-identifying female myself, I often spent time with Han and Uyghur lesbians and most of them smoked.

argue that this attitude toward drinking and smoking as a health hazard concerns exercising control over one's body by making the decision of whether or not to take care of one's health. People maintain onto arbitrary notions of control because it's comforting and self-soothing to have control, even though it may only be just an illusion of control. Smoking was this interlocuter's moment of agency in a small, temporary, mobile space occupied by the individual body. The taboo of smoking and ban on smoking was not directly related to state control because many Han smoke and smoking was allowed in most public places. This particular participant related it to the government, however, in saying that smoking provided a temporary *feeling* of freedom anyway. This could also be seen as an escape from the restrictions of conservative Islamic Uyghur society, where a double escape from both the state and society occurs.

Spaces of pleasure such as the dance club provided a mode of escape through alcohol and tobacco, music and dance from all over the world, and traditional Uyghur cultural expression. Spaces of pleasure and leisure were made not only to escape the stress of jobs and life, but also to transport one to a different time and space. The consumption of escapist Uyghur cultural spaces was a mode of survivance in an otherwise suffocating environment. However, not every Uyghur had the economic means to take part in these spaces of escape. The need for these spaces of leisure demonstrated the terror that permeated everyday life. Both the material and ideological aspects of the state effect were present at all times and spaces, but trying to ignore or forget about the state was comforting. Some tangible and material objects were present to hold and have in pleasure, which was evidenced in the women wearing make-up and holding smartphones, as well as the food, bottles of alcohol and packs of cigarettes that many buy. For example, one of my female friends told me, "If I ever get a bit of money, I always spend it on makeup. I can never get sick (*tonumaymen*) of having more makeup." The physical manifestations of the bubbles were the

tangible, material objects that were consumed—clothing, accessories, make-up, food, alcohol. The bubbles of happiness and escape did not travel or last. But with material objects, one could experience them over and over again as long as the object lasted.

While spaces of pleasure served as temporary barriers against state terror, consumerist modes of escape were, of course, never fully successful. First, they perpetuated existing classed power relations and distracted one from the work of resistance. However, as with Communist East Germany, when resistance was criminalized, inner-emigration was perhaps the only option. Nonetheless, leisure spaces were significant as mobile and temporary escapes that both provided relief from state terror while never fully escaping it.

The gaps in state control constitute the state through its absence: Holes in the net of state territorial sovereignty more clearly reveal where the net is located. As Smith (2012, 1524) writes: “As...the boundaries of the body are secured...the boundaries between territory and the body itself dissolve—the body exceeding its boundaries, refusing to be marshaled into an instrument of territory, even as territory seeps into the body.” Uyghurs attempt to create boundaries between themselves and Han Chinese, such as through the Uyghur marketed coffee shop and dance club, the body is refusing to be a part of Chinese territory. Nevertheless, the creation of spaces in the absence of state securitization and police presence only further obviates the spaces that are of state power. In the end, acts of escape only perpetuate the existing power relations that constitute them. The only alternative to these psychological and physical escapes are suicide or emigration. Revolt or resistance is not an option. Spaces of pleasure are also important for challenging and constituting state territory.

C. Learning English and Dreaming to Go Abroad: Psychological Bubbles of Escape

Another example of escapism and the flight of spirit through inner-emigration as a classed barrier was learning English or another foreign language and dreaming¹⁰⁶ to go abroad. The language training schools in southern Ürümchi were wildly popular. These schools exclusively catered to Uyghur students and taught English, Turkish, Russian, and Chinese. Although the training schools in southern Ürümchi that employed Uyghur or Western (read: white) teachers who spoke Uyghur were less expensive than their counterparts in northern Ürümchi that catered to the Han population, these schools were still extremely expensive and undoubtedly big business scams. Nonetheless, Uyghur students flocked to them despite class sizes ranging from 30-50 students at a time. People frequently approached me saying that they had been studying at these training schools for a few years, and still did not have the skills to hold a conversation in English with me. Sometimes these interactions stirred great anger in me because it was obvious to me that the English training schools were a scam that were robbing young students of their time and money because they clearly were not learning anything useful. Many students also approached me with big dreams to study abroad with their newfound English training.

However, upon further reflection, I realized that English classes and dreams to go abroad functioned in a similar way that the indulgent cakes, milkshakes, alcohol, and cigarettes did. Yes, the deserts and alcohol were more expensive than buying nutritionally rich vegetables, but still necessary for survivance in the midst of state and economic oppression. The dream of going abroad and the experience of exposure to some hope of gaining a marketable and employable skill that one could master better than a Han person was worth the sacrifice (see Jian 2016).

¹⁰⁶ When I say “dreaming,” I mean “hoping or wishing” (*umid qilish*) in Uyghur. Uyghurs do not use the Uyghur word for dream (*chush*) to describe hopes and wishes. I say dreaming here in the way we would say it in English, to mean hopes and dreams for the future. I’m not referring here to the more politicized “*mengxiang*” or “*zhongguomeng*” concept of dreaming as propagated by the Chinese government.

The idea of escapism and inner-emigration through learning English illustrates an alternative conceptualization of space. Inner-emigration allowed people to imagine a better life for themselves, a way to cope and survive, a way to get through the day, even if they never actually followed through on their plans. Until 2017, many Uyghurs had Chinese passports, and many Uyghurs had been abroad to travel or study. Even more Uyghurs knew someone who had been abroad, and this fueled excitement and possibility for many young Uyghurs for a better future outside of the daily humiliation of life as a Uyghur in China. The following conversations, though they would later change in the tense climate of 2017, are still relevant in helping us understand spaces of escape in the form of inner-emigration in the midst of strong state control.

March 2017: I was sitting in a coffee shop when I notice a young woman sitting across from me with winged black eyeliner carefully applied, white foundation caked on, and bright red lipstick shaping her mouth. When I looked up, her eyes darted down to the table as she lowered her head, and then peered up at me slowly with a grin slowly starting to creep up on her face. “Hi,” she said in English. “Hi,” I responded with a slow and knowing smile, because I know what is coming next. She opened in Uyghur with, “I just started studying English...I heard you talking on the phone in Uyghur, and I was surprised you could speak our language. I thought...maybe...we could be friends,” she said in Uyghur, smiling shyly. I asked her if she is teaching herself English. She said she works at a clothing shop during the day and studies English on her own in the evenings. She explains that last year she took an English class taught by a Uyghur person who had lived in the US for six years, but after teaching them the letters and their pronunciation on the first day, he had gone straight into reading and translating long articles. “So I didn’t really learn much, so now I’m kind of starting over with the alphabet,” she said, in Uyghur again. It soon became clear that she did not speak any English, but I was eager to practice my Uyghur and continue with the conversation.

I asked her, why do you want to study English? She says, “I want to go abroad.” Why do you want to go abroad? I asked. “For study,” she says, her eyes darting away from mine, chuckling shyly and again looking down at the table. I said, “Well there are a lot of English training schools around here, so there are lots of opportunities to learn English. But I guess it is pretty expensive.” She said it was 500 RMB [\$77 USD] a month for 2 hours a day everyday of basic beginner’s English with 40 students per classroom.¹⁰⁷ She said she wants to prepare for the TOEFL. “Anyway, can I add your WeChat? Maybe you can teach me English sometime?” I said we can

¹⁰⁷ This is quite a reasonable price, especially when compared to the prices of English schools for Han students. The relatively cheap prices entice many Uyghur students to enroll. However, it is still prohibitively expensive for many, and I still argue it is a scam because 40 students in a classroom is no way to learn a foreign language.

do language exchange and she agreed, telling me her name is Jamila. Nice to meet you, I said in English, and she collapsed into a fit of giggles. We exchanged the usual small talk introductions. I am older than her, but when she said her age, I couldn't help but ask her, "Are your parents pressuring you to get married?" She nodded and we chuckle knowingly together. "Yes, but I want to go abroad first. I just keep telling them that I need to finish my studies before I get married."

For many women, learning English was another means of attempted autonomy from the state and from patriarchy. As the weeks progressed, Jamila and I met frequently for language exchange, and we became close friends. Her main hobby was learning English, watching Turkish soap operas, and watching *Orange is the New Black* with Chinese subtitles. Jamila was cheerful and affectionate, openly showing her joy and playfulness with me by pinching me on the cheeks and squealing frequently. She always asked after my family and me, and asked why I was not married yet. She lived alone in a one-bedroom apartment. Her extended family in the countryside helped her pay rent and in exchange frequently stayed in the apartment when they came to the city, and often invited me over for dinner when her family was not in town. As she cooked me dinner one night, she told me her dreams of learning English, passing the IELTS or the TOEFL, going abroad, and never getting married. I told her we can grow old together as single women and she held out her hand to shake in promise. After dinner, she braided my hair and did my makeup, telling me I look beautiful with makeup and I should wear it more often. We took selfies making kissy faces into the camera and danced to Uyghur songs together, Jamila hollered and squealed in excitement to the music, and shook her hips with skill and confidence. After we collapsed on the couch, breathless from dancing too much, she confided:

My hope is to go and study make-up as an apprentice at a salon in America. I want to learn how to shade and contour in ways that will change the shape of your eyes and face. I could bring that back to Xinjiang and I'll get a lot of good business. Uyghurs will pay you 200-300 RMB to do their make-up for a wedding. By the way, I want to get a Ralph Lauren dress for my wedding." She showed me a picture on her phone. "I need you to bring this back from the States for me when I get married. You can be my maid of honor." When I explain to her that she could get luxury brands more cheaply by buying things second-hand, she claps her hands together

excitedly saying, “When I go to America, I’m going to buy so many pairs of name brand high-heels and Chanel purses that they will be bursting from my suitcase. (2017 conversation)

This vignette is telling for several reasons. First, the consumerist culture and the importance of consuming material objects was a possible a survivance strategy, or maybe simply materialist desires, for many Uyghur women that I met. Second, women experienced pressure to get married by a certain age. Women perpetuated the pressure amongst each other, as Jamila frequently asked me when I was getting married and encouraged me to wear more make-up. Third, the importance of Uyghur music and dance was crucial for Uyghur people as a mode of refusal to assimilate into Han culture, especially in the city (see Byler 2017). Finally, for Jamila as for many other young women who befriended me, learning English and the dream to go abroad provided fantasies of a better future: a future of suitcases bursting with Chanel purses, as well as fantasies of living independently and not getting married. The fantasy of never getting married was extremely common among the young women I met, who often complained that married women were burdened with raising children, cooking, and cleaning. Perhaps their fantasies were also about cultural and societal pressure, not only about the Chinese state, but a double oppression and double escape from state and society. Learning English was at least a ticket to dreaming and fantasizing of a wealthy and independent future, which allowed an escape not only from Xinjiang and China, but also in some cases an escape of parental pressure to get married and other patriarchal oppression rooted in Uyghur society. In the three years that I knew her, Jamila never did learn very much English, and the chances of her realizing her dreams of becoming a make-up artist apprentice in America were slim. But perhaps that didn’t really matter. It was more about the creative engagement of learning something new and the fantasy that was most important to the young girls that I met.

For at least many of the people I knew, studying and practicing English was the main, if not the only, creative engagement in people's lives. Practicing English with me seemed to ignite a spark of energy in people, and inspired fantasies and imaginations of greater possibilities than their current life allowed. Like Jamila, many people did not actually learn much English when trying to study with me, and it served more as an excuse to do something that was not their usual work, or an excuse to have fun and do something different from their normal, daily routine than anything else, while also offering hope for a better future. Even if their jobs had no practical use for English, many women from a variety of different class backgrounds enjoyed and eagerly pursued learning a little bit of English from me, as it gave them a break from their normal routine. The following is an excerpt from one meeting with the family from the opening interlude to this chapter:

We studied some English then, Guljennet changing the Latin letters into the Arabic alphabet for Muqeddes since Muqeddes never learned pinyin or the Latin writing system for Uyghur, so she couldn't read the English I had written for her. I told her I did the same thing—converting the Arabic alphabet into Latin letters—when I first started learning Uyghur. Muqeddes would periodically squeal and collapse into a fit of giggles when I said a sound in English that she could not pronounce. Guljennet was doing well, remembering the numbers and occasionally randomly yelling out phrases I had taught her like, “How many people are in your family?”

In addition to experiencing some joy in learning English, I also got the feeling that for many of my married female friends learning English was a point of confidence for them as housewives, a way that they could be more knowledgeable than their husbands as well. It was something to break the normal, everyday routine, and something intellectual to do with potential uses in the future. They exercised refusal by displaying their lived citizenship as cosmopolitan Uyghurs, members of belonging in an international community rather than only a Chinese one. The realities of a “learning English craze” in and of itself was perhaps not surprising. Many people around the world are of course eager to learn English or other foreign languages as a way to improve their job opportunities and possibilities for the future. But the sheer volume and desperation to learn English

that people approached me with, combined with the never-ending fantasies of going abroad illustrated the obvious way fantasies were so essential for the lives of many people. This occurred in the context of the Uyghur homeland as a settler colonial state, where social discrimination and structural violence meant that Uyghurs had very few job opportunities. Uyghurs have experienced disenfranchisement and dispossession, leaving very little hope for the future. As Smith (2012, 1525) writes, hopes and dreams are not apolitical but rather crucial pieces of how the body is related to national territory:

With a crucial link then, among religious identity, sovereignty, and the subject, the imaginary of national identity is made and remade, produced, refused, and cast aside in a thousand actions and reversals. National territory is made in part by the claiming of bodies, but the materiality of the body, and *the hopes and dreams that individuals have for their families*, make the body a rugged, at times impenetrable, terrain. What this brings to bear on our understanding of territory is that the body, collectives of bodies, and their material circumstances can become a component of strategy and an unpredictable terrain that might eclipse rhetorical strategy and efforts to materialize new territories through the body. (emphasis added)

The hopes and dreams of many Uyghur youth to learn English and go abroad was not a coincidence, nor occurred in an isolated vacuum. Rather, English lessons were couched in the context of Uyghurs as dispossessed subjects of a settler colonial state of elimination, where escape was essential to survivance. Clearly, for many Uyghurs learning English was a fantasy that gave them hope, but it was also a way that they can make their bodies as territory of “impenetrable terrain” of national Chinese territory. Instead of choosing to learn Chinese, they chose to at least try to go abroad by studying English and be a part of a separate system.

III. Spaces of Ignoring as Survivance for the Poor

The poor in the city did not always have access to the privileged and at times exclusionary spaces of coffee shops, dance clubs, and English lessons, and renters did not have the same luxuries as homeowners in terms of escaping in the home. Their coping mechanisms instead lay in the black

market and religious practices. The poorest residents of the city endured dispossession, poverty, and inequality, which illustrated the vast class differences in Uyghur society. In the case of the poor, they were still engaging in survivance tactics, but in their case, their practices were more about desperation than escape or freedom or refusal or autonomy. Rather than a story of freedom, the following stories are about fear, poverty, inequality, desperation, dispossession, and courage. Precarity is also a useful concept here to understand the situation (Butler 2009; Zeweri 2017).

A. Markets: Evading the Police in Desperation

State violence consisted not only as police patrols, but also manifested itself in abject poverty. People responded to poverty by hawking small goods on the street. The refusal to listen to the police warnings to leave the market was about desperation and need for basic survival through street vending, rather than as a sign of nationalist resistance. Many people turned to these informal economies as a way to support themselves and their families even as it perpetuated the exploitation of capitalism. Gago (2017, 5) shows that people construct and perpetuate the social relations of neoliberalism organically as a way to cope with dispossession. Rather than a set of policies, neoliberalism is also a way of life, she writes. Neoliberal practices are also about survival in the midst of poverty. Neoliberalism shapes not only our desires, but also dictates our ability to feed our families.

All of the following examples of marketplace interactions occurred in the Uyghur-majority neighborhoods of Ürümchi, where all characters are Uyghur unless otherwise noted and the markets are populated by primarily Uyghur sellers and buyers. When I walked to Muqeddes and Guljennet's house (same women from this chapter's opening interlude and the previous example about learning English), I passed through the Grand Bazaar. Two six-year-old boys were selling

containers of Q-tips, and another four-year-old boy was selling scented essential oils out of a wooden box, a tiny backpack with pictures of animated cartoons on his shoulders.

All of a sudden, the elderly lady selling dusting cloths in front of me grabbed her garbage bag of inventory, swung it over her shoulder, and quickly walked away. Immediately, the others around her did the same, running away while turning around to look behind them. Then I heard deep voices barking like dogs, and all the vendors quickly ran away. I slowed my pace so that I could observe what was happening without turning my head to look behind me, though I couldn't resist taking a quick look to see if the police officers are Uyghur or Han when they passed me. They were Uyghur. The old ladies who had legally rented stalls were not startled at all and sat calmly selling juice, while the other street vendors tried to close up their garbage bags and tried to escape as quickly as possible. As I walked past, I saw a pineapple vendor forced to pack up all his fruit while a Han officer looked on. The Uyghur officers passed me and pushed around the old ladies in front of me a bit, before quickly walking away and out of my sight.

I kept walking towards Muqeddes and Guljennet's house. Near their house, Muqeddes rented a stall where she sold home goods with a permit. Unpermitted street vendors congregated throughout that bazaar as well. The alley leading to Muqeddes's house was also filled with permitted vendors selling fabric and unpermitted merchants selling long underwear, scarves, USB cords, or sweatpants draped across their arms. Others sold bulging, juicy grapes, or slices of cantaloupe and honeydew melon. I entered the market, which was a quadrangle of stalls with an asphalt lot in the middle filled with permitted and unpermitted vendors. I was greeted by a sea of people (see Figure 4.1).



Figure 5.1: Curtain Market in Ürümqi, Xinjiang. *Source:* Photo by author in September 2016.

I could barely walk forward and gagged from the overwhelming smell of body odor. The lot in the middle was filled with rows of people, mostly old women and young girls, sitting on top of huge black garbage bags full of inventory and holding out merchandise for sale, mostly clothes such as red lacy bras, long wool underwear, baby clothes, watches, and plastic purses. A young girl, about four-years-old, with smudges of black soot on her face held out a slipper towards me, grabbing my legs and pulling on my shirt, and asked me to buy a pair. She followed me until I reached the stairs leading to Muqeddes's home goods stall. I walked up the steps to the second-floor when suddenly I heard a man's voice yelling "Make way, make way! *Bosh, bosh!*" in Uyghur from behind me. I looked and saw two police officers walking up the stairs. I quickly turned around

and made an exit to the street. I circled the block, and by the time I returned, the lot in the middle of the home goods market was eerily silent (see Figure 5.2).



Figure 5.2: The curtain and fabric market shortly after it had been cleared out by the police. *Source:* Photo by author, March 2017.

I turned and realized that the unpermitted vendors had set up shop in the alley nearby. This time instead of sitting, they were standing in front of their huge black garbage bags with their merchandise displayed on their arms in the street right outside the market where the police had just cleared out.

Later, I told Muqeddes that I was scared of the police who had called out “*bosh, bosh*” and cleared out the market. She asked, “What kind of police?” I told her, “The ones that came to remove all the vendors who were here.” “Oh, not to worry, they are just here to clean-up the place, they’ll do you no harm,” she said. “Oh, I was scared,” I said. Muqeddes rolled her eyes and waved her

hand in dismissal, clicking her tongue with impatience. By the time I left their house two hours later, the market was back to the way it had been when I first arrived: so crowded I could barely walk forward.

The police were clearly not efficient in “cleaning up the place,” but rather moved the unsightly evidence of poverty and vulnerability from the market to the street, and then back to the market again. However, the aim was not necessarily to be “efficient.” Rather, perhaps the aim was simply harassment. In economic desperation, people had little choice but to continue selling goods on the street in any way that they can. Despite the attempt by the state to get rid of what is viewed as unsightly or unfavorable through policies that criminalize street vending, they failed to enforce their own policies, which are illogical and arbitrary to begin with as they do not solve the problem of poverty but simply move it around. Space was nonetheless created by the street vendors. The irrational and arbitrariness of the disunified state was opaque and violent in its flailing, where control over space played a key role in the workings of the state.

The significance of the term “cleaning up” (*taziliq qilish*) that Muqeddes used is both about the cleaning out of certain bodies, and about making the market and the city in general more orderly and civilized. In her delivery, first, it was her way of explaining to me—with her roll of the eyes and dismissal wave of her hand—that the street police were not respected. However, Muqeddes spoke with me in other incidents about her animosity towards the police officers, even though they were not personally affected because they had a permitted stall. Similar to the above examples of dismissal and normalization in situations of great fear, it is possible that Muqeddes was actually anxious about the situation regarding the police presence in the market. However, it could also be problematic to analyze this phrase here because she was explaining the situation to me as a foreigner. She might not have necessarily used that word (*taziliq qilish*) with another Uyghur, and

I do not think she actually felt that the hawkers needed to be “cleaned up.” Before or after that incident she never expressed animosity towards the sellers in the market. She was perhaps just trying to comfort me and explain to me the situation.

Regardless of the way Muqeddes explained it to me, the incident was significant in that police actions in Ürümchi were indeed about a type of cleaning and also about order. The situation was undoubtedly related to cleaning or “sorting or straightening out” (整理) the city of certain people and unsightly or “chaotic” (Ch: 亂 *luan*, Uy: *qalaymiqan*) scenes in order to make the city orderly, legible, and beautiful. This type of “cleaning” is common in other Han Chinese cities as well, where urban management (Ch: 城管 *chengguan*) authorities frequently abuse the poor and vulnerable. Meanwhile, in terms of the vendors coming back a few hours later, the grassroots effort there was all about putting food on the table, creating market spaces and places in any way they can anywhere they can out of desperation. That is, they exercised a refusal to disappear and be eliminated (Simpson 2014). However, that refusal could only last so long.

About six months later, in May 2017, Muqeddes’s formal market was shut down by the *shequ* and police for impending demolition projects. The first time I saw the once-bustling market as empty storefronts was jarring. Besides the sounds of jackhammers in the distance, the market and the alleys were practically silent (see Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3: In May 2017, Demolition occurred on 90% of Uyghur streets and businesses. This once-lively business district sits empty the day after the in the area shops were forcibly closed. The propaganda banner reads: “The residents’ living conditions must be improved; Old city redevelopment is crucial” (居住条件要改善；老城改造是关键). *Source*: Photo by author, May 2017.

All of the shops leading to the alley towards Muqeddes’s house were dark, locked and shuttered, with red banners bearing messages such as, “Transforming old houses is the country’s move to improve the people’s lives,”¹⁰⁸ in white Chinese characters with the Uyghur translation in the Arabic alphabet on top, draped in the front. White Xs reading the name of the *shequ* neighborhood community center and the date over the doors, and numbers spray painted in red with a circle around them (see Figure 5.4).

¹⁰⁸ Ch: 改造旧房是国家改善民生的举措, Uy: *Kona oylerni ozgertish doletning xelq turmushini yaxshilashtiki tedbiri.*



Figure 5.4: The red banner over a Uyghur medicine shop reads in Uyghur and Chinese: “Transforming old houses is the nation’s move to improve the people’s lives.” *Source:* Photo by author in May 2017.

Along the other side of the street, rubble from the demolished buildings and a vacant lot stood in the place of a former market. Next door, new bamboo scaffolding with green screening quickly rose higher for a new building. Walking towards Muqeddes’s home, I eventually made my way inside the abandoned market where the permitted stalls stood empty and an abandoned metal detector still stood. Still, two rows of women were sitting with products displayed on blankets—underwear, leggings, socks, baby clothes. People continued to illegally hawk small goods on the street despite increased police presence.

I saw an elderly woman with a gold-colored headscarf in a long, black loose-fitting gown selling black tights. I remembered I needed some. I approached her, and I was standing right in front of her when she made no reaction to me reaching for the tights and kept looking towards the ground. I said, "Can I take a look?" and she jumped a bit as if she was startled. She turned her face up toward me and I realized that she was blind or partially blind. She got really excited and said quickly and eagerly, pushing the tights into my hands, "Yes, look, look, these are really great tights, high quality, only 10 *koy* for two. Touch them, they are soft and really great quality, you won't regret it." Then I noticed the other vendors quickly running away and within a second she and I were standing alone in the courtyard. I looked up and saw three middle-aged Uyghur police officers in blue security guard uniforms walking toward us, emerging from the pedestrian tunnel and chasing vendors away while gesturing animatedly with their arms. I told her softly, "The police have arrived," but she didn't hear me, so I leaned closer to her ear and told her again. Again, she made no reaction, so I raised my voice and spoke louder into her ear. She heard me and started walking away, toward the opposite gate in the same direction as me, but still pushing the tights into my hands, saying "Buy one, buy one!" I walked quickly away as I urged her to put the tights away and telling her that I would buy them later, scared that she would get in trouble for trying to sell them to me. She kept walking with the tights out in her hands, but she couldn't see where I had gone and kept calling out for me with the tights out and saying "10 *koy*, 10 *koy*." I thought, "Oh no, the police are going to see her." I ran up to her again and directed her, holding her arm, towards Muqeddes's house's stairway, so that her back was to the police. The police were just then walking by about 10 feet from where we were. I reiterated that the police were here, and she then stuffed the leggings into her bra. Her back still to the police, they walked by without ever looking in our direction or noticing me or her. After a moment, she showed me another pair of leggings

from underneath the cover of the shawl and said again, “Two pairs for 10 *koy*.” By that time, the police had left, so I said I only wanted to buy one pair of leggings. She grabbed my hand, and pushed two pairs into my hands. I reluctantly agreed, and she chuckled. Smiling broadly, she quickly and eagerly—her hands shaking slightly—felt out the change with her hands. She accidentally gave me an extra 50 *yuan* bill instead of a five *yuan* bill for the change. When I pointed this out, she giggled and explained, “My eyes aren’t good.” We got the change situation sorted out and she left with a big smile. Later, on my walk home, the street vendors were all selling only smaller goods this time. Instead of larger garbage bags of down coats and large carts of fruit, everyone was mostly selling long underwear, scarves, USB cords, and towels draped around their arms. Instead of black trash bags, they carried about 10-15 pieces draped around their arm, a small enough inventory to easily hide under their big winter coats if the police came.

The descriptions of markets here describe the ways in which police impeded the business of many of the poorest of Ürümchi’s residents. The city’s policies tried to “clean up” its image by attempting to eliminate any sign of want or desperate poverty. However, “beautification” policies did not solve the problem of poverty and hunger, but rather simply moved it around (Harvey 2005). Out of desperation, people continued to return to the markets where they had been kicked out, devising strategies such as hiding inventory under their coats if the police come as a refusal to disappear. Precarity, or contingent employment, left them always at risk. The state, despite crackdowns on street vendors and increased security infrastructure, nonetheless cannot always keep people from selling goods at the market (Gago 2017). The instability and irregularity of the state demonstrates a mode in attempting to “clean out” certain bodies from visible spaces, but those bodies consistently reappear to re-habitate space, particularly in the market.

In all of these examples, the police officers were Uyghur men. There was not a clear state-society binary, nor a clear Han-Uyghur boundary either. Although the security check stations were built and funded by the Chinese government, the employed police and security guards in these mandated neighborhood check stations were usually Uyghur: there was no clear actor or “bad guy” here. State spaces, lived spaces, and social spaces overlapped, as did the spaces of freedom with spaces of repression. As already discussed in the previous chapter, jobs at the *shequ* or with the police were important sources of employment for many Uyghurs. Shoppers too flooded the markets in need of food, and life continued on amidst this “new normal,” as people “got used” to the heavy security presence that was more for show than for actual safety, a police presence that made itself obviously and visibly futile in the midst of everyday life.

Winter 2017: It was around noon on a Friday, and I was out making copies when I noticed a lot of men walking fast—and some running—toward the direction of the mosque. As I walked closer to the alley, the numbers of men increased, prayer mats tucked under their arms, hands in their pockets, shoulders shrugged and head bent against the cold and wind, walked briskly into the entrance of the alley. Three uniformed men sat by space heaters in the toll booth *tekshurush* station, and one of the alley blockades was raised to allow the crowds of men to walk through it. That alley sat silent where it used to host a market.

By the time I started back towards my house about 45 minutes later [when noon prayer was over], the streets were bustling with vendors and shoppers, people yelling names with the affectionate high-pitch and drawn out syllables (“Abdullaaaaaaah!”), eating *kawap* on the street and kids running and playing. Fruit merchants selling apples and mangoes lined up with their wheeled push-carts on the street, yelling out “*alma 2 kilo 5 koy! mango 5 koy!*” and bright orange clementines and tables with sliced watermelon lined the streets. When I crossed the street closer to my house, there were five apple and mango carts lined up, more than I had ever seen in that alley, manned by Uyghurs, including one gray-bearded fat man with a big smile saying “Come, come! *Keling, keling!*” (2017 fieldnotes)

There was clear evidence that people at least attempted to continue on with everyday life despite security surveillance measures. Sellers and consumers of food and other essential goods continued to come to the market despite security presence out of the necessity and sometimes desperation of mere survival. The paradox of a heavy state security presence amidst the flows of everyday life

illustrates evidence of people continuing to breathe amongst the suffocation by creating spaces of livelihood in the markets. The vignettes in this section on market places in particular focus on security measures in markets and the ways people seemed to ignore them. State controls and surveillance permeated the surface, while life—especially buying and selling at the market—proceeded in reality. Life in Xinjiang was a contradiction between rumors and paranoia of state surveillance, and alongside life continued on as routine as possible. Space and territory play a key role in this negotiation between state and society, where state boundaries and ethnic divisions are blurry and overlapping rather than clear and discrete, in the same way that the modern state is chaotic and irrational even if it tries to appear to be rational and scientific.

Chinese infrastructure and security presence permeated everyday life and the built environment of Ürümchi. Nevertheless, as was shown through the men carrying prayer mats to the mosque, the street vendors selling fruit, the security guards in the *tekshurush* stations not paying attention, the rods in the gate that had broken off and left space for people to duck through them, the gates and road blockades that were intentionally left open (for convenience if nothing else), it was clear that everyday life proceeded relatively normally in Ürümchi even amidst the crackdown of 2017. As the examples in the previous chapter showed, this is not to say that people did not experience structural violence and arbitrary evictions and detentions. But it is to say that street vendors often successfully found places to sell their goods in any way they can, even in the midst of police and state security presence. This contributes to our understanding about the creation of space through informal economies in ways that challenges and extends our understanding of spatial production. Refusal and lived citizenships overlap with and separate from state territorial sovereignty.

B. Ethno-Religious Practice

Religion played an important role for Uyghurs in providing a higher authority above the state and a moral compass to follow. In this context, ignoring the state was logical because for many Uyghurs, it was the afterlife that mattered. Some of my participants told me that religion provided a comforting coping mechanism and survival tool for getting through this life and onto eternal salvation in the next. When much of the country ostracized and demonized Uyghurs as criminals or terrorists, many Uyghurs took pride in their Islamic practice as a selfless and righteous moral following. Thus, especially showing a foreigner that Uyghurs were morally righteous people was an important thing to prove. It was also comforting for many Uyghurs to have customs and an identity tied to their birthright that was connected to a message of morality and of salvation to paradise in death.

During the spring, before the demolition of their market, Muqeddes explained to me that her older sister's kidney was failing and explained to me the Islamic customs of how they would hold a funeral for her. "But now with the government they don't allow us to read the Quran or hold such ceremonies," she said. Then lowering her voice down to a whisper, she said, "But we do it anyway without them finding out." She continued whispering, telling me, "We still follow our religion, how could we not? Even though the government and the police are really cracking down on us these days." As I was leaving for the day, I was about to open the door, when we saw shadows coming down the stairs. Muqeddes grabbed my arm and pulled me back and shut the door, indicating with her index finger on her lips that I should be silent. They did not want their neighbors to know they had been meeting with a foreigner. We waited for the people to pass and then she opened the door and said it was all clear for me to go now. Practices of secrecy and whispering illustrate that religion was an important part of their lives that they at least tried to continue to practice despite the restrictions.

Fasting during Ramadan is another example of ignoring the rules and practicing control over one's own body as a form of territorial control. The following is from a conversation with two research participants during Ramadan. E is a male and S is a female, both are in their 20s:

E: "It's really hard to fast this year. They have your neighbors spying on you, reporting if you're not eating, and they check the homes to see who is eating at lunch time."

S: "What are we going to do?" [sighs and shaking her head, then proceeds to talk quickly and sharply, a tone of annoyance and conviction in her voice] "Well, honestly, I don't care. I'm fasting anyway. How will they know? They can't catch me fasting. There are how many people living in our *shequ* area? At least 5,000. They can't keep track of all of us. What are they going to do? Charge me for not eating? They can't prove anything. By the way, what are you doing with a half-empty Pepsi bottle in your backpack?"

E: [bursting into laughter] "Oh, I'm faking it (*zhuangbi qiliwatimen*)¹⁰⁹ so it looks like I'm not fasting."

S laughs loudly. "That's hilarious."

Me: "S, I noticed you too gave yourself tea today during our meeting, was that your version of faking it (*zhuangbi qilish*)?"

[S laughs and hides her face in her arm] "Yeah! Did you notice that? Then when the leader would look at me I would pretend to take a sip." [gesturing how she would pretend to slurp, bringing a pretend cup to her mouth].

When the sun set, we broke our fast with watermelon, nan, cookies, and raisins. "Wow, I feel so fortunate (*fengfu*) [sardonically using the Chinese word]! What a rich and colorful life," E said as he took selfies of us and the table. "The first time Ramadan has been rich in Ürümchi!" [sarcastically collapsing with laughter]

Some Uyghurs were successful at ignoring or avoiding state regulations. People continued with their religious practices despite heavy-handed controls and constant surveillance on each other and on neighbors. This conversation shows a kind of quiet opposition or symbolic resistance (see also Smith Finley 2013). Both devised strategies—carrying a half-empty Pepsi bottle, pretending to

¹⁰⁹ Here E uses a mixture of code-switching with Chinese and Uyghur: *zhuangbi* is a common Chinese slang word to mean "poser." *Qiliwatimen* or other derivations of the Uyghur verb "*qilmaq*" is a Uyghur verb meaning "doing" and is often used in conjunction with Chinese words to turn the Chinese word into a verb.

drink tea at a gathering with others—to avoid suspicion of fasting. They also used humor and frequently laughed (see also Fluri 2019 on jocular geopolitics and precarity). Later, they also discussed the ways they had become so accustomed to the military presence they barely notice it anymore. Yet it had significantly impacted their everyday lives, including how they celebrate holidays. People created bubbles and exercised agency alongside tight state control. The fasting was particularly poignant in revealing the ways people practice autonomy from state regulations through practices such as abstaining from food and drink.

About one week after this conversation, and still during Ramadan, E ended up moving out of that apartment and into an apartment with Han roommates, saying that he felt so uncomfortable under the constant surveillance of his Uyghur roommate who worked at the *shequ*. Perhaps Uyghur state employees were under greater pressure from the state to demonstrate loyalty, or had quotas of the number of people they had to turn in. He explained that since his Han roommates did not know anything about Islam, they would not even notice if he was gone on Fridays at noon or ate a late snack during Ramadan. This situation illustrates the complex dynamics between Han and Uyghurs. There was not discrete separation of Han versus Uyghur and state versus society, but instead ethnic and state spaces were overlapping and encompassed a fuzzy, gray area of uncertainty.

The incoherent and distant nature of state control is revealed through glimpses of freedom in the home and body. Uyghurs often found ways of circumventing the rules and engaged in strategies of escapism or ignoring the regulations of the state bureaucracy. People ignored state presence as best they could despite, and perhaps because of, the large and growing military and bureaucratic presence in their everyday lives. Often it seemed that the tighter restrictions became, the more eager people were to find escape. Even in the most pervasive and oppressive of military police states, people create bubbles or shields as a sphere of independence and autonomy—even

if only for a moment—as various modes of refusal, survival, escape, and belonging as played out in different spaces.

C. Religion and Clothing

Religion was an important part of life for many Uyghurs. For example, Uyghurs often used phrases such as “God willing” and “thanks be to God” to describe daily life, rather than complaining. In addition to fasting during Ramadan, covering the hair with a hat when the headscarf was banned exemplified disregard for the rules. Note that the practice of wearing and prohibiting the headscarf was highly uneven. Each city or county had different regulations that varied over the course of my fieldwork. Different buildings also had different rules. For example, the headscarf might be allowed on the school campus, but not inside school buildings. It was often unclear how strict the rules on wearing the headscarf were. According to rumors, the headscarf was banned in schools, but I often saw young students in their school uniforms walking to and from school wearing the headscarf. Until 2017, it was also common to see students wearing the headscarf on university campuses. I do not know if they were intentionally breaking the rules, or if they took their headscarf off before entering school buildings that I never witnessed. The following example, therefore, is not meant to be representative of everyone’s experience.

Besides a subtle way to turn one’s back to the authorities, covering the hair also provided comfort. Whether through the headscarf or a hat, covering the hair provided a signal of belonging to the Uyghur community. Consider the following example about covering the head. Although headscarves were banned in some public buildings, such as school and the university campus, it was permissible to wear it on the street or in private businesses. (NOTE: These are the same two friends, E and S, from the previous Ramadan example):

Spring 2017: E and I were sitting on a bench in the park when S came running up, beads of sweat forming on her upper lip and out of breath. “I’m so sorry I’m late!” she exclaimed, giving me a big hug and touching each of her cheeks to mine with a kiss.

S: “I went to the bazaar today to get some *shepke* [hat with a brim] because they’re not allowing me to wear the headscarf anymore.”

Me: “Really? Not even the turban [tied in front of the forehead] you were wearing last week?”

S: “Nope, I can’t wear that kind. Only *shepke* are allowed now.”

Me: “What about *posma* [winter cap]? You used to wear those a lot too.”

S: “Nope, now that the weather is warmer, they’re not allowing *posma* anymore either. Only *shepke*. So I went to the market today to get a couple. That’s why I’m late.”

Me: “Who is responsible for this? I mean, who is keeping track of who is wearing headscarves?”

S: “Our work unit is responsible. My boss keeps track of it. But also the security guard at the front gate of our office says, ‘bu rang jin’ [Chinese for “not allowed to enter”] if you are wearing a headscarf. They won’t let me in. So I had to get a *shepke*.”

In that moment, I saw three women in the distance with bright red headscarves, and asked, “What about them?”

E: “They are *apash*. You know, kind of old ladies. They just work here in the cafeteria or cleaning. They’re allowed to wear headscarves. It’s the younger, front staff employees that aren’t allowed to wear them.”

After lunch, I walked them to their office. I noticed that there was a young woman with a red headscarf wrapped around her hair (not her neck) entering the building.

Me: “What about her?” I whispered, and made a wrapping gesture around my head.

E: “It’s okay as long as nobody sees her.”

S added, “The thing is, there are people always watching and they secretly observe (*mehpeyi kozitip*) and mark down students who are doing religious things, including wearing the headscarf. The only reason I know is because my brother works in government and someone told him, ‘S has been marked for having a headscarf, she needs to stop.’ Apparently one of my ‘friends’ or perhaps workmates were reporting me to someone. That’s why I stopped. I got some inside information. But maybe *that* girl doesn’t know.

S’s choice to wear the *shepke* as a way to avoid trouble allows her to maintain some semblance of control over her own body. The conversation also illustrates the irregularity and inconsistency of

the regulations in the same way that the home inspections were random and pointless. There were rumored and actual inspections and punishments, but the implementation was unclear and uneven, perhaps a mechanism for perpetuating fear and a feeling of surveillance rather than a realized elimination of the headscarf. In the above example, I was confused over why, if the headscarf was supposedly banned as S claimed, there were still women wearing it. S wore a *posma* or a *shepke* every day, and according to the times I chatted and joked with her co-workers, everyone knew that it was a proxy for a headscarf. Similar to the home inspections, the supposed rules around wearing the headscarf functioned as a mechanism for fear, and circumventing the rules around it was a way to cope with the fear of surveillance by believing that God would provide rewards in the afterlife. For many, this involved doing good deeds and following religious rules over state rules to prepare for a better life after this one in paradise. Nonetheless, there was tension between whether to follow the state rules or religious rules:

In our hometown in the countryside, we cannot wear black like our religion tells us to and we cannot wear headscarves tied in the front of our necks. Professionals¹¹⁰ can't cover their heads at all, even with a hat. You cannot cover your head if you enter a public building, like a government office or a school. But if we do not cover our heads, other Uyghur people will stare at us and they will shame us for being immodest. The headscarf for us is a symbol of our respect for God and our respect for men and for our own bodies, chastity and modesty. It is a symbol of our culture, our religion, and our ethnicity with roots in the Turkish, Persian, and Arabic worlds. And yet we are reminded always that we cannot even dress ourselves without permission from the government. (2016 interview)

In addition to an important religious practice, wearing headscarves and clothes that mark a body as Uyghur is a performative enactment of lived citizenships and belonging in Uyghur society.

Eating Halal¹¹¹ was another important practice for all Uyghurs. Halal food and signage was not

¹¹⁰ *xizmetchi*

¹¹¹ “Halal” is an Arabic word that means “permissible.” In terms of food, it means food that is permissible according to Islamic law. For a meat to be certified “halal,” it cannot be a

forbidden or banned by the state during my fieldwork. Halal was a way for Uyghurs to refuse to eat with Han people or in Han people's homes. For some Uyghurs, eating Halal or not eating Halal was an important part of how they identified people and their culture. For example, many people asked me when they first met me if I ate pork. If I said yes, they often felt uncomfortable as it was seen as dirty and immoral to eat pork. They saw eating pork as a part of Chinese influence on their culture.

You know those [Uyghur] people who study at Chinese schools, they don't care if something is Muslim Halal food or not. They apparently think, as long as it is nice (*peyzi*) food, then I'm going to go ahead and eat it. We know that KFC is not Halal, but I've realized that Uyghurs go in and eat there anyway. Maybe in the future people will start eating more and more non-Halal food, thinking it doesn't matter, and will pay even less attention to it than they do now.

I don't think it's about Han people, but usually it is about those kids who study at Chinese schools, they don't really pay attention to what is Halal or not. We [Uyghurs who studied at Uyghur school] too don't care too much as long as they write Halal on the package, then we believe it, but we still don't pay attention to who the cook is or investigate if it's really Halal. (2016 interview)

While this participant did not connect the loss of Uyghur culture to Han people specifically, she used the example of children who have studied in Chinese schools as a way to illustrate that some Uyghurs who had heavy Chinese influence from the time that they are small were losing their Uyghur customs. She also admitted at the end that "we too" do not investigate whether something is actually Halal or not. She connected her culture, customs, and the loss of them to the religious practice of Halal.

Ethno-religious practices, both allowed and forbidden, were ways to distance from Han culture of not covering the hair and eating pork, which functioned as a means of coping and survivance under a climate of losing one's culture. Control over what one wears publicly and how

forbidden cut (such as meat from hindquarters) or animal (such as pork.)" Certain guidelines must be followed during the slaughter of an animal.

one demonstrates cultural affiliation and belonging in the Uyghur community is a demonstration of in-group belonging and the rejection of Han cultural influence in the region. Wearing clothes that mark a body as Uyghur is both a performative enactment of lived citizenships and belonging in Uyghur society, as well as a refusal to disappear from the social and cultural landscape. Following religious practices, especially covering the hair and eating Halal food, is comforting. These stories are about the transformation of the landscape under unequal power relations, and the desperation of poverty.

IV. Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the spaces of disruption at the scale of the body, home, and market in the homogenous state territory of China. The people exercise refusal through lived citizenships that do not coincide with the homogenous imaginary of state space. Space is analyzed in this chapter through: 1) Markets: policing, the cleaning of bodies and spaces, the creation of “order,” and the destruction and creation of spaces and market places and spaces in formal and informal economies, and 2) The coffee shop and dance club examples, where we see escapism wherein people are mentally gone even though physically there, epitomize how territory goes beyond the physical and becomes a part of the mental and social part of life as well.

Ethno-religious practices illustrate a refusal to assimilate into mainstream Han society and culture, and as a mode of in-group Uyghur belonging and agency amidst growing and oppressive state control. Acts of refusal embody bubbles of escape that disrupt Chinese state territory and challenge hierarchical territorial scales, where the bodily scale challenges the state scale. This conclusion is consistent with what Smith (2009, 2012) writes about in regards to where the body is a contested territory, a border of community where it signified in material and symbolic ways the loyalty of an individual to the Uyghur identity and not to the Chinese identity. In the empirical

examples above I show relatively banal and mundane examples of everyday life through acts of refusal to assimilate, both of which function as modes of escape through social belonging amidst increasing state control as pressure. I emphasize the ways Chinese territorial control over Xinjiang have seeped into normalized routines and everyday practices from clothing to business practices.

Escape and refusal practices occur in both material and ideological ways. I make three key arguments. First, Uyghurs create bubbles of escape as a mode of survivance. I observed the spatiality of escape and survivance as fuzzy gray areas of state space, spaces of escape and ethnic space, were not divided but overlapping. I observed that these practices were key coping mechanisms. Second, the ability to cope was related to access to resources. Wealthy Uyghurs, especially homeowners or working professionals, were much more likely to have access to spaces of escape and coping mechanisms than poor Uyghurs. Poor Uyghurs, on the other hand, often turned instead to religion to cope. In the previous literature on the Uyghurs, scholars have ignored intra-Uyghur inequality and differences, instead reifying the Uyghurs as a coherent and unified ethnic group. I point out that Uyghur society was fractured along class lines. Class was almost just as important as ethnicity in determining the outcomes of state terror. Inequality was a major determining factor in determining life outcomes, and a major part of life that determined access to these coping mechanisms and spaces of escape. The modes of escape shown above illustrate the attempt to take back control of one's time and location in space.

Individual agency can also be enacted by individuals in spaces outside of or alongside the disaggregated state—a state that is not unified and concrete, but in fact, as we saw through these examples, fractured and disparate. By showing the ways in which bubbles of escape are created in everyday life, I hope to challenge the way we think about the power relations that underlie notions of nationhood as discrete, static, and bounded spaces.

INTERLUDE

One day, M posted on her WeChat: “Sometimes I really hate my own identity. I’m from Hoten, I’m Uyghur, and I’m a lesbian...” [three frowny face emojis]

M is a Uyghur from an urban area in Xinjiang. She is female presenting and is married to a Han butch lesbian, who she refers to as her husband. But they are not legally married since that is not possible in mainland China yet. However, she and her lesbian partner performed a marriage ceremony in Ürümchi with friends. We were talking with some friends on the first day of Ramadan.

“I can read and write in Uyghur, though I have to admit that I can’t read and write very well anymore. Ever since I came to Ürümchi for university, I’ve been surrounded by Chinese language and Han people, and I haven’t had the opportunity to practice my Uyghur, and I’ve started to lose some of it.

M is crying. “I know I seem like a *minkaohan* (Uyghur educated in Chinese school) because I don’t have any Uyghur friends. My mom always asks me, ‘Why don’t you have any Uyghur friends?’ It’s because I haven’t met anyone who I can get along with. So I just feel so lonely and weird. On the Ramadan holiday, all I want is to speak my mother tongue and have that feeling like I’m at home with family celebrating the holiday. Sarah understands that feeling, to be away from home on a holiday. All you want to do is be with your people and speak your mother tongue, isn’t that right?”

M’s uncle, her only relative in Ürümchi, got arrested, and so she doesn’t have anyone to spend the holiday with.

“I don’t dare to contact him or my family here in Ürümchi for fear of also getting arrested. My mom said not to contact him. I have nowhere to go for the holiday. If I was single, I would go home for the holiday and I would be preparing for the holiday now. I’m so scared of talking to my parents a lot or even going home for the holiday because I’m afraid I’m going to let it slip that I’m married, I’m so afraid they’re going to find out that I’m a lesbian, so I just haven’t been talking to them much. I’m just so sad. I feel like such an outsider, especially because Uyghurs are not able to rent houses in the city, and in July it’s only going to get worse because of 7/5. Eid doesn’t even feel like a holiday to me anymore.”

CHAPTER 6

“WE CAME WITH HIGH HOPES FOR A NEW LIFE”: DISPOSSESSION, DEVELOPMENT, AND DISPLACEMENT

Ürümchi.
Huge
Desolate
Angry.
We came with high hopes for a new life
A free life
We came to find the same *tekshurush*
That we already knew so well.
The sun beating down
No jobs
No money
No food
No water to bathe in
No way out
Just signs that declare the *minzu tuanjie* of the pomegranate
And facile security guards sleeping and watching porn.
Not keeping us safe and not giving us freedom either.
Are you my Big Brother?
Closed in like animals
Segregated like criminals
Spied on like traitors
Or maybe we are traitors...
After all, who gives a shit about the Olympics when it's a bunch of tiny Kitay playing ping
pong?
All I know is that what happens in this life is not as important as the next
So I'll keep praying to Allah.
At least I have my children.

-August 2016, anonymous (a Uyghur research participant's poem)

This chapter is a study of rural-to-urban migration among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The aim is to present a contrast with the experiences of Han rural-to-urban migration in Xinjiang (Chapter 7). The differences between Uyghur and Han rural-to-urban migration experiences, for example those related to feelings around homeland and place, reveal the settler colonial aspects of dispossession in Xinjiang.

While the Uyghurs that I interviewed in Ürümqi at least somewhat saw themselves as living in their homeland, most Han people in Xinjiang do not (see Chapter 7). Furthermore, the Han and Uyghur research participants reported different urban experiences. For the Han, the city of Ürümqi was full of opportunities that offer higher salaries and more opportunities for advancement than the Inner Provinces (*neidi*).¹¹² They were often excited about the fun things to do now for leisure, including swimming and skiing (see Chapter 7). But Uyghurs told me over and over again how they feel that their life is hopeless. They told me that the morning and night bazaars had been shut down, so the city was not as lively as it used to be and money was hard to make. Still, for Uyghurs the city was free in political and cultural senses, a place they went to in order to stay close to home and families, but still connected to culture and homeland. In this way, Ürümqi was better than the cultural isolation of *neidi*, they said. Still, for Uyghurs, Ürümqi had few opportunities and it was hard to find work, which led to desires to learn English and go abroad. Ethnic majority and minority differences played a major role in migration related to settler colonialism and development in Xinjiang (see also Saldana-Portillo 2016).

In terms of ethnic tensions getting worse, July 2009 (“7/5”) was mentioned at least once in every single interview. “July 2009” refers to ethnic riots that rocked the city and killed hundreds of Uyghur and Han people. For the Uyghurs, the primary narrative was summarized as “The Han

¹¹² Ch: 内地

massacred our people. Ürümqi has not been the same since, ethnic relations significantly worsened after that incident. Things were actually quite good up until then, inter-ethnic friendship were common before 2009, but not anymore.” After the riots, the city police conducted a major sweep and arrested hundreds of young, Uyghur men, and expelled thousands more from the city. Meanwhile, the police completely shut down all morning and night markets, which were semi-informal street markets selling produce and snacks. Ostensibly, these markets were shut for safety reasons, but their target were poor Uyghur migrants selling food. One person’s experience reflected many of the themes in the interviews: “Since 2009 is that there used to be lots of morning and night markets, and now they are completely nonexistent. As a result, things, especially food, have become a lot more expensive” (2016 interview). The shutting down of markets contributed to growing unemployment and difficulties in making money after Uyghurs moved to the city.

The territorial state dispossesses the rural poor minorities in ways that affects people’s lives. Meanwhile, dispossession and development occurs in the context of alienation of minorities who are included in the idealized and bordered “nation-state” while also being ostracized (Simpson 2011; Byrd 2015; Moreton-Robinson 2015). This is the story of dispossession of rural livelihoods, and the territorial dispossession of livelihoods in the city.

During my last six months of field work in 2017, large sections of my field site underwent demolition and eviction under “urban renewal” schemes meant to beautify and develop the city with construction of high-rise buildings in efforts to produce new spaces for exchange value, as well as evict poor Uyghurs from the “civilized” city. I use the analytic of “dispossession” to better understand this process as it focuses on inequality and the urban landscape, life in the city, and social relations. Dautcher (2009, 48-59) writes about what he calls the “desettlement concept” in Xinjiang, what he describes as “the destruction of Uyghur *chthonic* [Greek for “of the earth]

identity,” or social identity and solidarity with a physical place rooted in the land. Dautcher (2009, 51) uses the term “desettlement” to emphasize that the social problems of forced resettlement occur in the Uyghur community *without physical relocation*. Dautcher (2009, 51) writes that “even without moving them, [the state] can displace [Uyghurs] in other ways. If the cognitive maps...and social practices of Uyghur chthonic identity can be systematically reordered by the state, Uyghurs’ capacity to articulate claims to political entitlement based on their sense of belonging is weakened.” Dautcher (2009, 51) writes about the ways that “the Chinese state sought to undermine specific practices that bound Uyghur identity to place.” Instead of using the term “desettlement,” I use the terms displacement and dispossession to emphasize that I witnessed forced displacement, not just the destruction of identity without physical location that Dautcher notes.

While there has been extensive literature on rural to urban migration in China, the questions remain: How does the Uyghur experience differ from the Han experience in the city? How does dispossession occur for rural minorities from the city? How does the China case speak to the settler colonial literature on dispossession? I found that rural minorities undergo a triple dispossession: 1) Displacement from the Countryside, 2) Relocation to the Alienated City, and 3) Eviction from the City (see also Byler 2018 who finds a similar pattern in his data with rural migrants in Ürümqi). Then, I compare and contrast the poor Uyghur experience with the wealthy Uyghur experience. Whereas wealthy Uyghurs displayed a relatively optimistic outlook on life, poor Uyghurs emphasized that they had no choice.

I. Displacement from the Countryside

A. Moving to the City for Political and Cultural Freedom

From Aygul's¹¹³ perfectly lined eyebrows, white powder foundation, painted eyelashes, and flowered headscarf, one likely would not guess that she, her husband, and two young children live together in a tiny, single room behind her fruit stand. I frequented their shop daily and conversed with her for many months before she invited me in for the first time.

After inviting me in, she quickly arranged the piles of extra blankets, decorated mats (*korpe*), and clothes into a corner, swept the carpet with a straw hand broom, pulled out their guest *korpe* with gold trim, folded it over double for me, and urged me to sit (see Figure 5.1).

¹¹³ Aygul means “Moon Flower” and is a common Uyghur name. Aygul and all other names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms. Please note that to protect the identity of my informants, I do not include specific details about their demographic information when quoting from interviews. For more information about the demographic details of my interviewees, please see Chapter 2. When I do provide detail, such as through the character of Aygul in this chapter and other characters throughout the dissertation, the demographic details, including age, gender, hometown, occupation, and family status have been changed. Aygul is a composite of several female rural migrant informants and is one illustration of the experiences in Ürümchi. The rest of the quotes in this section are a sample collection from all of the 22 Uyghur rural migrants interviewed.



Figure 6.1: A photo of a typical Uyghur living room with carpet, decorated korpe, and a tablecloth for eating while a child sleeps in the corner. *Source:* Photo by author, September 2016.

Flustered, she apologized profusely for not having any tea on hand: “We just don’t have the conditions (*shara’it*) for luxuries like tea right now.” She then brought in naan, hot water, and tiny clementine oranges from the shop for us to share while we talked. During the interview, which took place over four meetings, I asked Aygul about her life in the city. She had moved to Ürümqi 13 years prior from a rural village in Xinjiang. She told me:

When I first moved here, for me Ürümqi was awesome (*peyzi*). There was every kind of person and every kind of opportunity, and a lot more freedom. In such a big city, it’s impossible for a lot of people to know your business, and also harder to control what people do and wear as well. I can wear the headscarf and wear all black [in accordance with Islamic law] here [in the city]. (2016 interview)

Her words echoed common sentiments expressed during the 22 interviews with rural migrants. Many rural migrant interviewees agreed that they came to Ürümchi seeking cultural freedom. For example, excerpts from interviews with different people included: “I like being able to wear jeans and nobody can stop me.” “You can’t go anywhere in my hometown without being gossiped about.” “I had to leave the countryside after my divorce and everyone looked down on me.” “I like being able to walk around and not see anyone I know.” The city offered a type of freedom in anonymity from both state surveillance and socio-cultural surveillance for many rural migrants. Similar to the discussion of alcohol and cigarettes in Chapter 5, the move from rural to urban Xinjiang signified in some ways the double escape from both the Chinese state and Uyghur society. This relates to other cases of rural-to-urban migration around the world, where moving to the city often entails experiencing a new “urban citizenship” where social and cultural performances of belonging in the new urban society are related to processes of social and material capital (Holston and Appadurai 1996; Ong 1999; Secor 2003; Staeheli 2003; Staeheli 2012). There are parallels with Secor’s (2003, 2004) research on rural migrants in Turkey, who are located on the periphery of national identity and cultural belonging, while material and bodily symbolic gestures, such as wearing the headscarf, signal association as rural or urban subjects. Social and cultural capital shape consumption practices in the city. Some rural migrants expressed positive feelings of breaking from their Islamic traditions and wearing new clothes, which shows that Uyghurs are very diverse and do not share a monolithic Muslim identity.

In addition to the freedom from community gossip, most rural migrant interviewees spoke about the importance of the relative political freedom in the city, especially when it came to cultural and religious practice: “We aren’t allowed to go to mosque in our hometowns.” “They make the Uyghur women take off their *yaghliq* and wear short skirts.” “We are reminded always

that we cannot even dress ourselves without permission from the government.” Their sentiments illustrate the ways in which cultural practice and political policy intersect. For many people, the state continuously intervened into daily life through ethno-cultural religious restrictions. Other rural migrant interviewees spoke about the relatively intense surveillance in their hometowns: “The local politics have made [my hometown] a difficult place to live. It’s not free like Ürümchi is.” “There are police and roadside checkpoints everywhere, people are afraid to leave their homes for fear of getting arrested for no reason.” “We came with high hopes for a new life. Everybody in [my hometown] wants to leave and come to Ürümchi, and our relatives told us not to come home and to stay in Ürümchi for now, at least until the situation (*veziyet*) gets better.” *Veziyet* was often used as a seemingly neutral euphemism to refer to the government or to mean “political situation.”

Aygul told me:

It’s just recently that the local politics, I don’t know if you understand this, but the local politics have made it a difficult place to live. It’s not free like Ürümchi is. Everybody in [my hometown] wants to leave and come to Ürümchi, and our in-laws told us not to come home and to stay in Ürümchi for now. For example, they [the government] don’t understand that wearing headscarves is just how we’ve grown up—I’ve been wearing a headscarf since before I can even remember, and so we’re just used to it. But they are trying to control the religion, and it’s turned it into a bad situation...You’re not allowed to have things with Arabic words or other Islamic decorations in the home. So it’s not free like Ürümchi is. It’s all about trying to suppress the religious beliefs. We’re all so sick and bored of it (*ziriktuk*) (2016 interview).

For many of the rural migrant interviewees, the city offered relative political and cultural freedom compared to their hometowns. Although political freedom tightened and surveillance increased in the city in 2017 (see Chapter 4), the city was considered freer compared to rural Xinjiang. Interviewee respondents reported experiencing surveillance in rural areas that pushed them to find freedom in the cities.

Concern over freedom from gossip and stress about clothing expectations overlapped with discussions of state restrictions on religious practice. At times, these narratives were contradictory:

While many rural migrants sought freedom from what some described as “suffocating” community expectations on female modesty around dress and appropriate behavior around Islamic practice, many also complained about how the government restricted their ability to freely practice religion, such as wearing black and adorning headscarves. There was not a clear narrative here: the participants clearly felt torn about this issue, and many participants complained about their parents’ expectations as much as about the government’s restrictions for their clothing choices. Similar to the interlude of a queer Uyghur that introduced this chapter, many young Uyghurs felt conflicted about their identity, torn between modern, urban life exemplified on television and around them, and their roots in Muslim tradition. I found that many Uyghurs, especially those suffering from double or triple oppression of being a woman and/or queer, found themselves isolated and displaced from their family, community, and traditions while also not fitting in with mainstream Han society either. In the end, the theme of seeking freedom in the city remained consistent throughout the contradictory narratives about the role of religious practice and dressing and behaving modestly.

B. Jobs and Educational Opportunities: “I had to move to the city because there are no jobs in my hometown”

In addition to political and cultural freedom, all of the rural migrants also came to the city for work or accompanied their husbands or parents who had come to the city looking for work or for school. Economic dispossession played a major role in displacement from the countryside in Xinjiang as well. One surprising theme in the interviews with rural migrants was that economic development caused negative effects on their hometowns in the countryside. I had heard rumors in 2014-2015 of the political practices in Southern Xinjiang that made farming difficult or impossible. I had heard that the cadres holding meetings for the farmers all the time, or making them dance and sing in Chinese instead of farming. The repeating narrative of “the economy has

gotten worse” (*iqtisad tovenlep ketti*) became a major repeating theme in the interviews in response to the question “How do you think economic development has affected your hometown?” This narrative that “economic development is causing negative effects on my hometown” majorly diverges from Han narratives in Xinjiang (see Chapter 7). For the Han interviewees, rather, economic development had *forgotten*, not ruined, their hometowns (Tynen 2014, 2018). Perhaps as a result of state education and propaganda, I heard the narrative that economic development had greatly improved living standards and overall had benefitted the people. Even if the rural migrants in other cities, such as in my own work in Nanjing, carried the narrative that “there are no jobs in my hometown,” they never suggested that economic development had strong negative effects on their rural hometowns because the remittances sent back from the cities still greatly improved the lives of those still in rural areas, they said.¹¹⁴

The “economy is getting worse” narrative was surprising to me at first because people in general, but especially in China, often associate the term “economic development” with improvement and increased standard of living. In Uyghur, the word for development is *tereqqiyat*, which comes from the Arabic word for “advancement” or “progress” and carries a strong connotation with the word “progress.” Furthermore, the Uyghur words “economic development” (*iqtisad tereqqiyati*) have become so strongly associated with the Chinese state that the terms are used virtually synonymously, or euphemistically, in Uyghur to be equivalent to “Han and government influence.” When I asked the interview question “How do you think economic development has affected your hometown (where you grew up)?” it was clear from the answers people gave me that this question was often taken to mean, “How do you think *Chinese influence*

¹¹⁴ These narratives I heard in Ürümchi and Nanjing were from a select group of responses that may differ when speaking to other Han or minority people in poor, rural areas of China.

[Han people and government] has affected your hometown?” because they often spoke of the changes that have occurred with more Han in-migrants and Han businesses. For example, Aygul explained:

Development had a lot of good effects on my hometown before, but not anymore. They shut all the markets down at 5 pm Xinjiang time¹¹⁵ [for the nightly curfew]. Also, there are at least five meetings a week for anyone in the government sector. So they’re all just wasting a lot of time taking political classes and holding meetings instead of actually doing work. So all that has had a really negative effect on the economy. So everyone back home wants to come to Ürümchi for work. (2016 interview)

In this case, Aygul connects the political situation, where tight restrictions on movement and surveillance causes an unbearable living situation, with negative effects on the economy. Most of the rural migrants who had grown up until 18-years old in the countryside expressed sentiments in line with Aygul. For example: “Economic development has had a negative effect on my hometown; I had to move to the city because there are no jobs in my hometown.” “In the countryside, everyone is a farmer, you sell your wheat and then you’re done. In the city, there are all kinds of occupations, businessmen, traders, bankers, cooks, government workers, and police. Well, there are police in the countryside too...” “The economic development in my town has decreased in the last 10 years, because the government is controlling the vegetable and wheat prices, taking the extra money, or they are making everyone go to political meetings instead of working, so it’s had a really negative affect on the economic development.” “People used to always be going to the market and doing business, but now everyone is under too much control to do much of anything.” “The government is wasting time and resources like water for political schemes that are hurting the economy. Our streams used to flow full, and now they are all dried up.” For these interviewees, economic dispossession in their rural hometowns in conjunction with state and community surveillance

¹¹⁵ 7 pm Beijing time

drove them to the city. Economic dispossession combined with ethnic discrimination and dispossession of homeland as a colonial project. Their reports of government inefficiency and waste was also a theme explored in Chapter 4. First, the inefficiencies were a form of control through confusion and attention diversion. Second, the inefficiencies also signaled the ways that state power is formed from multiple actors, which causes chaos. All in all, it is important to note that the respondents noted the ways that the government seemed to be wasting resources.

Consider the following from Guljennet in response to me explaining that my research was about urban development:

The government is claiming that our society is getting better and our lives are improving with urban development. They say they are helping us by helping us develop...It's like the way that government is demolishing houses all over [my hometown], saying it's for development, saying they are helping us, but really they are just taking homes away from poor people. It's a big waste of time and resources for everyone involved. (2017 conversation)

Uyghurs in Xinjiang were subject to state development projects that, according to a majority of my migrant respondents, had largely negative effects on their rural hometowns. This finding sheds light on the role and effectiveness, or lack thereof, of state-led development, and also highlights the colonial project of power and control through “economic development” projects such as demolition and displacement of people from their homes.

II. Relocation to the City

A. Stuck between a Rock and a Hard Place: “I don’t like the city, but amal yoq. I can’t go back to my hometown”

People felt compelled to move to the city for work or school. But a narrative of desperation ran deeper than simply economics. The theme of “I can’t go back” (*berip qaytalmaymen*) was key in all of the rural migrant interviews for multiple reasons. The economic, cultural, and political repression in rural Xinjiang did not allow them to leave the city, they claimed. For rural migrants, a repeating phrase in the interviews and field notes was “*amal yoq*,” which literally means “one

doesn't have a way/method," and is used in Uyghur to mean "there's nothing to be done" or "I have no other options." For all of the rural migrants, this phrase "*amal yoq*" came up in interviews and conversations at least once in reference to their stories of migration. Often their stories of moving to the city were couched in the terms of "*amal yoq*," and many expressed that they had no choice but to move to the city. The lack of choice spoke to the depth of economic dispossession that many experienced in their hometowns that drove them to the city and kept them there.

Not only did the migrants speak to "I can't go back," but they also expressed dissatisfaction with their lives in the city as well. Most rural migrants said that while they enjoyed the convenience and freedom of the city, overall they disliked the city: "There is too much traffic, pollution, and it's too crowded." "Uyghurs in the city have poor morals." "I'm lonely and homesick." "I hate the city. For example, people are selfish here." "We have lost so many of our customs since moving to the city, especially wedding ceremonies and guesting. Everyone here is too busy with work and nobody has time to host guests. In the countryside people will come over to your house and sit with you for hours." "My life is hopeless and I want to go abroad to get out of here, but I can't get a passport." While some talked of the freedom of the city, they also spoke of a further dispossession after relocation from the jobless countryside to the city: loneliness and struggle in a new culture in a city of pollution and, for some, the stress and alienation from community through wage labor, which was couched in terms of selfishness and loss of community practices such as guesting. Because they often said both, "I can't go back," and "I hate the city," Uyghur rural migrant narratives in the city were shrouded in hopelessness and depression. The Han narratives of moving to the city, which I will explore in the next chapter, were often couched in very optimistic terms of higher salaries, job opportunities, and promotion advancements when talking about life in Ürümchi.

While most interviewees said they disliked the city, about half said they did not plan to return to their hometowns for the reasons cited above: no jobs and no freedom. For the Uyghur rural migrants, most never said they had “moved to Ürümqi” (*kuchup kelmek*). They corrected me if I accidentally used that verb “to move” (*kuchup*). They did not use the verb “to leave” (*ketmek*), nor “to move away and arrive” (*kuchup kelmek*) to describe the fact that they live in Ürümqi. They instead used the verb “to live and stay” (*turup qalmaq*). They said they would only use the verb “to move to Ürümqi” (*Ürümqiğe kuchup kelish*) if their entire family, including their grandparents, also moved to Ürümqi. Even for those who had lived in Ürümqi for many years, they did not identify as having moved to Ürümqi or being from Ürümqi, but just living in Ürümqi. Even as they repeated the theme, “I can’t go back,” they also never fully identified with a feeling of belonging or home in Ürümqi either. Instead, they identified strongly with their hometowns, as Hotenian or Kashgarian for example, reflecting the importance and strength of local place-based identities in Southern Xinjiang, and the dispossession they experienced in the city (Rudelson 1997).

What separated urban from rural Uyghurs was choice. One woman told me, “We hate the city, but we have no choice but to move here for the jobs and political and cultural freedoms.” Uyghurs from urban areas (explored more in-depth below) spoke about moving to the city in terms of aspiring for a better future through educational opportunities in the city. Rural migrants who came to the city seeking a better life are met with alienation and dispossession in the city revealed the political-economic implications of dispossession under urbanization and development projects. The theme of insisting that they had no choice but to stay in the city and could not return to their hometown in the countryside for economic and political reasons foreshadowed the coming demolition, eviction, and incarceration of Uyghurs in 2017.

B. Economic Pressure: “Security has had a negative effect on our business, it’s hard to make money (pul tepish tes) in the city”

Besides the repeating themes of pollution, stress, and morality, another prevalent theme that emerged in response to the interview questions among most rural migrant respondents to questions about their life in the city was “it’s hard to make money [in the city]” (*pul tepish tes*). One of the most striking aspects of the *amal yoq* and “I can’t go back” narrative discussed in the previous section was that people said that, while having no choice but to move to the city for economic reasons, they strongly disliked the city, and were not making any money or very little money. This was surprising to me at first. If people were not making any money in the city and they did not like the city, why were they here? I realized later that when people said they “weren’t making any money” (*pul tapalmaymen*) that they meant they were making a subsistence living, just enough to house and feed themselves and their family. After inquiring with my research participants during interviews about my confusion, it became clear that they were putting up with the alienation of the city and the poor business because their hometowns were even worse. Living in the city was their only option to support their families. Declining business was a major theme in the interviews before the incarceration and demolition started in early 2017. When the incarceration began for Uyghurs, the order to go back to their rural hometowns was terrifying for them because they could not support their families there.

Other informants spoke of the negative changes in the city over the past ten years. For those who had spent 10 years or more in Ürümchi, the repeating theme for both rural and urban Uyghurs was: “The city has overall gotten worse in terms of traffic, pollution, ethnic tensions, security, and economic situation.” Many people said, reflecting their poorer economic prospects: “business and

[Uyghur] population¹¹⁶ [*adem*] has declined.” “The morning and night bazaars have been shut down, so the city is not as lively as it used to be.” “The economy is suffering, getting worse (*tovenlep ketti*).” The Uyghurs encountered a second economic dispossession after moving to the city.

C. Increasing Resentment: “They are taking away our culture, our religion, and our language”

In March 2017, Aygul’s daughter Guzelnur was playing in the street with the neighborhood kids, her face and hands black with soot. Her face turned into a giggly smile and her arms outstretched for a hug when she saw me. I dropped my grocery bags and lifted her up into my arms as she squealed and gave me a kiss on each cheek. I stopped at Aygul’s shop to greet her by touching both of my cheeks to hers with light kisses, and picked up some fruit. She tried to give me free naan, but I told her that eating too much naan will make me fat. She tried to refuse my money for the fruit too, but I insisted, putting it into her fanny pack since she would not take it. She finally acquiesced and invited me to sit longer. The tiny room was heated by a coal stove in a corner that glowed red with burning embers. I tasted the coal in the air that made me cough and my throat tighten. The fumes made it difficult to breathe, but it was warm inside. My glasses fogged up, and I removed my layers. She was embarrassed—apologizing for the mess and the mildew smell—“I did laundry yesterday”—and saying, “I just don’t have any *shara’it*.” Guzelnur squatted and peed in a bucket on the floor. There was no toilet in their house, only one across the street that they have to pay one kuai each time to use.

Nevertheless, Aygul excitedly put out the nice *korpe*, and poured me a cup of tea. This was the first time she had ever done this for me; they never had the luxury of tea before. She giggled

¹¹⁶ Note that in this and other examples, when Uyghurs referred to “people” [*adem*] and “everyone,” they were explicitly referring to Uyghurs and usually Uyghur migrants. Han people were always referred to as “Hanzu,” and never as “people” [*adem*].

and clapped her hands excitedly as she started to make noodles for lunch. I hung out with her as she cooked and refused my help. We chatted. She said, “I’m so tired and worn out. I’m a mom of two young kids, so there’s no such thing as rest for me. On top of that, my niece has hours of homework to do, and I have to help her with it. The kind of homework they have in middle school is the same kind of material we had when I was in high school! And you know what? Their Chinese homework doesn’t even have *pinyin* on it. When I was in school, we started learning Chinese in middle school with *pinyin* on it. Now, they’re in elementary school and they don’t even have *pinyin*!”¹¹⁷

Aygul’s complaint is a common one, especially echoed amongst my friends with children: “The kids’ textbooks are all in Chinese these days, I can’t help them with their homework.” “They are learning Chinese before they even learn Uyghur.” “It’s really hard for them in school because they don’t understand the Chinese in the classroom.” “We keep using more and more Chinese in our language so it’s gotten regretfully broken (*buzulup qaldi*).” Dispossession of language and culture is a major theme. The nation-state dispossesses minority bodies within a nationalist state. Aygul looked at me for a second, and asked, “Do you believe in Islam?” (*islamgha ishenemsiz?*). Then she said, “We would get punished for reading the Quran. The book is no longer allowed anymore under the broken politics (*buzulghan siyaset*) of today.” I asked, “What about prayer?” In 2016, I had often seen people praying in restaurants and seen my friends praying at home according to the five-times a day prayer time schedule. She said,

Oh, yes, of course I pray. Praying is allowed, it’s just that having the Quran on hand or in your house is illegal. The worst part is that we can’t teach our kids about religion. So our culture is changing and we are losing our religion. If you learn when you’re young, it sticks (*tutulup*)

¹¹⁷ Pinyin (拼音, or “to phoneticize”) is the system of writing Chinese characters using the roman alphabet. When Chinese children are learning how to read, the books often have the pinyin with tones above the characters. Here Aygul code switches with the Chinese word “pinyin” when she was talking to me in Uyghur.

with you, but if you can't teach the kids," she said gesturing to her one-year old she was holding, "They won't learn about religion when they're young and won't hold on to it. (2016 conversation)

People felt the control of state presence and surveillance in their lives and expressed their resentment towards it. Despite rumors, complaints, and realities of state control, people continued on with religious and cultural practices in their daily lives—praying, for example.

Aygul and her husband had recently done a little remodeling in their naan shop. There was a new wall separating the area that used to be the fruit and vegetable shop, but which was now a bedroom for the kids with *korpe* spread out for sleeping on the carpeted ground. Aygul explained that they had hired a new worker and were expanding the naan shop, so they tore down the wall that was there originally to make room for more bread-making space. The newly constructed wall created a new room in the space so that Aygul now had a more “proper” kitchen. A table was set up for her to make noodles, they had bought a mini refrigerator that was set up next to the propane gas burner, creating a kitchen feel where she now she had a space to cook.

III. Eviction from the City: Removal and Incarceration

The following story illustrates the change in 2017 that marked a significant escalation in policing of homes and residency permits that led to widening desperation. In 2016, people still prayed and talked about religion as Aygul does above, but 2017 marked a significant crackdown on religious practices and rural migrant residence permits (see Chapter 4). The crackdown of 2017 involved two separate but overlapping policies. First, residence permits to rural migrants were increasingly restricted. Second, a demolition project for the purposes of “city beautification”¹¹⁸ flattened most Uyghur-owned shops in many of the business markets in Tengritagh District.

¹¹⁸ Ch: 城市美化 *chengshi meihua*

During this time, the city was also trying to become a “National Civilized City,”¹¹⁹ and the demolition campaign might have been related to that effort as well. Because many Uyghurs lived in their shops and relied on their shops for their livelihoods, these two crackdowns were related, but at least on the surface, the demolition and residency permit issues were two different policies that nevertheless both occurred in overlapping spaces and times during Spring 2017.

First, only semi-recently moved migrants (post-2012 migrants) had to leave Ürümchi. Rumors abounded of re-educations camps where people were sent for years for political crimes, such as any kind of religious activity. Then, Uyghurs could not live in their shops anymore. Next, Uyghur shops were demolished. Then, it became all Uyghur rural migrants had to return home, no matter how long they had been in Ürümchi. Later, it would become that all Uyghurs, no matter their local or migrant registration (*nopus*), could not rent a home in the south of the city. They could rent in the Han districts, however, and some did move up north. Li Tian told me of the process at her *shequ* in the north: “Last week, a minority wanted to live in our *shequ*. His house got demolished so he had to find a new place to live, and he came running to the north. Either I or another *shequ* cadre or police officer had to meet with him every day for three to four hours for two weeks” (2017 conversation). Local *nopus* holders who were homeowners were the only ones who could stay. The purpose was to fill the quotas of the county level in southern Xinjiang that 10% of the population must be in re-education camps (Zenz 2018).

At the time, I didn’t know what was going on, and nobody else seemed to know either. It was confusing and scary. The rules kept changing and escalating. One day while I was eating lunch with Li Tian, she got messages on WeChat saying that Zohre’s Han husband was getting ready to put the deposit down on a rental. They had not told the landlord or the *shequ* about Zohre being

¹¹⁹ 全国文明城市

Uyghur, and they were just going to sign the lease and Zohre was going to live there without telling anyone. Li Tian responded in a voice message, “Zohre could get arrested for not registering at the *shequ*. We just got notified of a new policy at the *shequ* yesterday, which is that everyone has to provide a lot of materials to register now, that it’s getting even more strict, and they told us that minorities aren’t allowed to rent houses, period.” It was common that new policies would come out at the *shequ* on a regular basis. Li Tian looked up from her phone and said to me, “The policy put down yesterday means that everything in the city is getting stricter and stricter, and minorities are not allowed to rent houses anywhere.”

“What if they have a local *hukou*?” I asked.

“Then they have to buy a house.”

“What about *Huizu*?” I asked about the Chinese Muslim minority group.

“*Huizu*? Oh yeah I guess they are minorities too. Well, I’m not sure, but I don’t want to talk about this here anymore. I’m afraid someone is going to overhear us. But actually it kind of depends on the person (*kan ren ba*). If they are upper class, I mean educated or wealthy, then it would be okay.”

Nobody knew it at the time, but the purpose of evicting Uyghurs from the city was to force poor Uyghurs to go back to the countryside where they would be met with forced internment. Even those who had declared earlier that “I can’t go back,” had no other choice but to return to their hometowns, never to return.

One day in April 2017 only two weeks after Aygul and her family had so optimistically expanded their naan shop, I stopped at Aygul’s shop around 8:30 pm as I often did on my way home. She was sitting on the carpet in the front room playing on her phone, and Guzelnur was soundly sleeping under a pile of coats next to the fruit and vegetables for sale. When I approached,

she stood up to greet me with two kisses, one on each cheek, and her eyelids were drooping with sleep. “I’m sitting out here waiting to sell all the naan,” she explained. “Not all of it is gone yet,” she said, pointing her nose toward the front shelf where about 20 circles of naan still stood.

“How are things?” I inquired.

“Well, the *shequ* said that my husband can’t stay here [in Ürümchi] any longer. They are kicking everyone [the Uyghurs] out of Ürümchi who came after 2012. Since I’ve been here before then, I can stay. But they aren’t letting him or my kids live here. I told my husband I wouldn’t leave the city, so he left and took our two year-old son with him. I’m not going back to rural Kashgar. I can’t go back there; the politics, the economic situation—it’s so much worse than here. So I don’t know what’s going to happen,” she said with a wavering voice, tears pooling in her eyes.

It was then that I realized that the entrance to their back room was boarded up and a pipe had been installed and was poking through the board to allow them to get water from the spigot inside.

“What happened with the door?” I asked, pointing my nose toward the living room door that was boarded up with the spicket poking out.

“Oh, the *shequ* made us do that. They said we can’t live here. We can open the shop but we can’t live in the back, they said. They didn’t give a reason. So much that they are doing right now is without a reason. The reason is that they want us [Uyghurs] to leave the city. The purpose is to make us leave. That’s the reason, of course. But they don’t say that. They just say, you can’t live here.”

“So they forced you to board up the living space?”

“Yeah, they said if you don’t board up the living space, we’re going to board up the entire shop,” she said as she rolled her eyes and sighed.

“If they did that, we wouldn’t be able to sell anything. So we boarded up the living space, and I’m living with my parents [within walking distance of the shop] now. I mean, I sleep there at night. I didn’t tell them [the *shequ*] about Guzelnur,” she repeated.

She looked at my concerned face and laughed. “Everything’s fine! It’s not a big deal. We just need to take it day by day. There’s nothing anyone can do about it (*amal yoq*). Everything’s fine though, there’s nothing to worry about.”

A couple weeks later at the end of April 2017, I went to visit Aygul again.

Aygul sat down next to me on the carpet. “Apparently the May Day Labor Day holiday is not for us. Our family has run into another difficulty. We just got word today that all the shops from here to the Arman [a chain supermarket down the street] will be demolished on May 4th [in three days]. So our shop will be gone soon. There’s nothing we can do about it. We told them, ‘You’ve got to give us money as compensation,’ but they just said, ‘Every shop gets a different amount,’ which is another way of saying that we’ll never be compensated. Besides, we’re just renting this place anyway. Even if they did give compensation, it would go to the owner of the building.”

“Where are you moving to?” I asked.

“There is no place to move to!” she said, as though she was talking to an incompetent child. “But now they are evicting *all* migrant Uyghurs from the city. They are all so evil, they are breaking up families and they don’t even care.”

I told Aygul I was sad to hear this, but my words sounded flat as my heart sat in my throat.

“All of us here have broken hearts here, eh?¹²⁰ We can’t do anything here, they won’t rent to us [Uyghur people], they won’t let us buy a house, they won’t let us live here or work here, nothing. They just want to send us away. So they’re evil. There’s nothing to be done (*amal yoq*).”

Some people came to buy naan, so Aygul abruptly got up and I said a stale goodbye.

As I walked toward my apartment, the man from whom I always bought garlic naan—an older portly gentlemen with squinty eyes, a *doppa* Muslim cap, and a mustache, his large, round belly protruding over his belt—was packing gear from his tiny naan shop, a big fan and a lamp, into the back of a small tricycle tractor, the kind they often use for recycling old household items. “What’s going on?” I asked.

“They’re demolishing our shop tomorrow morning.”

“Where are you going to go?”

“We’re just going to go back home to Kucha [in Southern Xinjiang], there’s nothing else we can do (*amal yoq*),” he says without smiling, his lips purse into a slight frown, and he throws up his hands in resignation.

Behind us a few pairs of men were speaking loudly in Uyghur, wobbling down the street with their arms around each other, one pair holding the other’s face in each other’s hands and foreheads pressed against each other. As they walk passed me, I hear them promising to always be there for each other in slurred and loud voices.

As I passed the last intersection to get to my house, I saw a small four-door white sedan stopped with its headlights still on, three camouflaged military police on one side and a police officer in black on the other, leaned over and talking to the driver. It was normal to see young

¹²⁰ Uy: *biz bu yerde hemmimizning konglimiz yerim boldi—deee* (The “deee” at the end of a conjugated verb is for cases of extreme emphasis, and is almost equivalent to “eh?” at the end of an Canadian English sentence but with much stronger stress on the importance.)

Uyghur men stopped randomly by police to check and scan their IDs when walking down the street, but it was new to see a car getting pulled over.

The next night, the lights were on in Aygul's shop, a curtain and a table pressed up against the window and everything boarded up, but you could see the light leaking out into the night from inside. I suspect this was to prevent the *shequ* from seeing or proving that anyone was still living inside.

I stopped at another naan shop to ask them how they were doing. I showed how sad I was, saying how sorry to hear they were leaving, but they just laughed and said, "No, no we'll find a new place. It's going to be fine. We're sad too, but we'll sell our stuff at a place nearby, it won't be a problem. We're not worried about it." I asked the *kawap* griller next door (the same one from the opening prelude of this dissertation), whose shop had a big number "46" spray-painted in red and circled on it: "Where are you going to go?" He shrugged and said, "I don't know yet" with a smile. Everyone was acting as if everything was normal. I wondered if that was how they felt in their hearts or if they were just putting on a brave face. Above everything else, I sensed the predominant feeling was: *amal yoq*.

Later that week, in early May 2017, I saw a family leaving their home behind Aygul's shop and piling into the back bed of a pick-up truck that was filled with furniture and a television set. None of them were carrying bags. The older ones were carrying infants, and the younger kids holding hands with each other with tiny backpacks on, leaving their home for good. There were about ten kids in the bed of the pick-up truck.

The rest of the shops were shuttered and locked with big white X's to prevent anyone from getting back in. I saw through the window that there were still some blankets inside Aygul's shop. The white X's read the name of the neighborhood community center office (see Figure 6.2).



Figure 6.2: The notification of demolition by the *shequ*. Both of the pieces of paper say the same thing: Victory Road Management Committee Nanliang Shequ Letter: May 2017. *Source*: Photo by author, May 2017.

I noticed a big white X taped firmly across the front doors of the noodle place next door. I walked up to the window and looked inside. The display case for cakes was still illuminated, with half a watermelon sitting inside. Tables and chairs were stacked inside, with a metal basin filled with white porcelain cups, and a container of spicy chili peppers and a basin of vinegar on the table closest to the window. It was as if they hadn't even been informed of the demolition with enough time to clean out the inside of the shop.

“It’s closed!” a police officer yelled at me loudly. I ignored him, turned and walked away. Next to the noodle shop was a recently built a police station, which also had a huge Chinese

character reading “demolish” in red and a number spray-painted on it, its doors locked shut with a chain around the front. The neighborhood was going to be flattened, even the police stations. A street that was once bustling with activity as described in Chapter 1 now sat silently (see Figure 6.3). By mid-May 2017 gone were the people who depended on those businesses of buying and selling to sustain their livelihoods. The need for order and control superseded the human need for connection, networks, and livelihoods.



Figure 6.3: The “chai” symbol of demolition marks a Uyghur restaurant in Ürümqi. *Source:* Photo by author, May 2017.

The next day, I approached Aygul’s shop. I saw Aygul’s husband outside the shop with their son, and they were piling household goods—a water boiler, a fan, a lamp, blankets—into the back of a tricycle mo-ped. There was a group of men standing around and talking in the entrance

of the alley next to her shop. I chose not to stop and say hello, too nervous about being seen and not wanting to draw attention to her husband or the situation or me. Later, in mid-May 2017, I met with Aygul in a coffee shop, and she told me:

This situation is just out of control [shaking her head]. They are cracking down like never before. I have to leave. I have to go back to Kashgar now, or else I'll get arrested. They might arrest me or send me to "re-education" training school. I'm not going to call you. You go to my house every day and find my mom and dad, and through them we will keep in touch. I'll ask my parents how you are doing, and you can ask them how I'm doing, and in this way, we can keep in touch. I'll go back to Kashgar for a couple weeks, get a letter from the *shequ* for permission to live here for 6 months, and I'll come back here. We'll find each other again. After that I'll have to go back and get another letter, then I'll come back here. I can't stand to live in Kashgar for too long, there's no way for us to make money there. But things are really getting tight (*chingip ketti*), especially in my hometown, so I wanted to explain to you why I wouldn't be able to keep in touch while I'm gone.

They arrested the two people working in our shop. I don't know how, but apparently they did a roadside check on their ID and they had a problem with their ID, so they got arrested. They're going to be in jail for 40 days and then are apparently going to be released, but you know how things are these days, you can't really believe or trust anything they say, they say lots of things, but you don't know what's real and what's not. So who knows if they will actually be released or not. Apparently my husband's friend's brother and sister were arrested too. So you just never know what's going to happen. (2017 conversation).

She shook her head and raising her eyebrows while pursing her lips. That was the last time I saw or heard from her. I kept in touch with her parents for a few weeks, but after that, even saying "hi" to them felt too dangerous.

This story illustrates the way that poor, rural migrants were evicted from the city in fear and silence through a slow escalation and tightening of rules, as well as targeted neighborhood policing that profiled rural Uyghurs and used demolition, for the purpose of re-development, as a reason to force Uyghurs economically and politically from the city and into internment camps. The authoritarian state along with the bureaucracy of the *shequ*, police, and economic dispossession worked together to target the most vulnerable in the city for the purpose of securing and fabricating social order through incarceration. These policies largely affected Uyghurs who rented and

Uyghurs who did not have local *nopus*. For urban Uyghurs who were homeowners, they were not affected as much.

IV. Wealthy Uyghurs' Story: Homeownership and Displacement

The 24 Uyghur interviewees who grew up in cities, in contrast with the earlier analysis on Uyghurs from rural villages, carried a different perspective. For them, economic development had some positive effects on their urban hometowns: “There has been an increase in educational opportunities, especially learning Chinese and other foreign languages.” “There are more highways and apartment buildings, and more fun things to do, like go out to eat and go to the movies.” “A wider variety of fruits and vegetables is now easily and cheaply available.” However, most also noted some negative aspects of urban development: “There is too much traffic, pollution, and it’s too crowded.” For those who lived in Ürümchi for longer than 10 years, I asked them what has changed in the last 10 years. “The population has decreased as a lot of people [Uyghurs] have left the city” In this context, when Uyghurs say “people” [*adem*], they are referring to Uyghurs. Undoubtedly, the Han population has notably increased, but when Uyghurs say *adem*, they mean other Uyghurs. I am not sure if this is implying that Han are less than human in their eyes. “The government has closed down all the fruit markets.” “The morning and night bazaars have been shut down, so they city is not as lively as it used to be and as a result food prices have risen significantly.” “Business has declined as people [Uyghurs] have fled the city.” “Ethnic relations have worsened.” “Security has tightened.”

For wealthier Uyghurs with urban *hukou/nopus*, the displacement that Aygul experienced was not always a direct threat. For the better-off Uyghurs in my study during 2017, many wealthier or urban *hukou/nopus* holders did not express urgency or great concern over the evictions and incarcerations. One of the common repeating themes for the urban *hukou/nopus* holders during

2017 was, “Southern migrants are getting kicked out, but we don’t have to worry because we own our home.” Talking with one wealthier civil servant who was from Turpan but owned a home in the city, she said to me one day,

Right now things are so tough with the government, we have no freedom. Everyone is being sent to re-education, and we’re getting scared. Things are getting so strict (*chingip bop ketti*), the worst thing is that with bilingual education, the kids can’t speak Chinese well and can’t speak Uyghur well, kids aren’t interested in learning how to write Uyghur, we are losing our language and our culture, bilingual education is a real problem. (2017 interview)

In this way, Merhaba echoes Aygul’s and other rural migrants’ sentiments from the previous section about grievances regarding loss of language. Poor and wealthy Uyghurs do have some concerns in common. However, later, Merhaba said:

Did you notice how all the shops are closed down (*taqaldi*) around here? It’s because the government is making everyone¹²¹ from Southern Xinjiang leave Ürümqi and making them return to their hometowns. It’s going to be hard to find someone to do the recycling of our old furniture. They are making everyone leave, but especially the kind of people who would be doing the recycling would definitely not have any rights to stay. (2017 conversation)

Here a wealthier Uyghur saw the evictions and incarcerations more as an inconvenience when they needed service work done rather than as a humanitarian crisis. At the same time, even though Merhaba is privileged as a government employee and a homeowner, in the first quote Merhaba says that she is scared. However, this was certainly not a universal experience for the wealthy in Ürümqi. The wealthiest family I knew did not have local Ürümqi *hukou/nopus*, even though they owned two homes in the city of Ürümqi. One day in summer 2017 when I visited their home, I noticed that some of their relatives were gone. They told me, “You know how it is. The policies are getting really tight (*ching*), so they’re not allowed to stay here and were forced back to our hometown. Even though we bought this house, the newborn baby has to go home and get a Hoten

¹²¹ Note that in this and other examples, when Uyghurs referred to “people” and “everyone,” they were explicitly referring to Uyghurs and usually Uyghur migrants. Han people were always referred to as “Hanzu,” and never as “*adem*.”

nopus.” This was a concern for many women I knew who were pregnant or had small children: They had to return to their hometowns in order to get a *hukou/nopus* for their rural town because they were not permitted to get an urban *hukou/nopus*. In the case of the wealthy family, the entire family did not experience displacement—at the time of that interaction they could still stay in Ürümchi because they were homeowners—but they still had some problems with their relatives who had come to stay with them.

Consider the following interview excerpt from one research participant, whose family was originally from Southern Xinjiang, but his *hukou* had been switched to an urban Ürümchi one at a young age. This participant in his twenties was relatively wealthy. He owned a car, and his parents had gone on the Hajj to Saudi Arabia:

The *shequ* is getting really strict and cracking down, so nobody is allowed to live in our house except for my family. So it’s totally empty. They’re not allowing people (*adem* [in this context, his use of the word “*adem*” means Uyghur people specifically, not Han migrants]) to come to Ürümchi. They [rural Uyghur migrants] have to get a letter from their home police stations first. Ürümchi is really only good for professionals—doctors, teachers, government workers—and if you want to do some small business like selling watches or fruit, you will get kicked out. You have to go to southern Xinjiang to do that. (2017 interview)

3 months later, I met with him again:

My house is getting demolished. They said we need to get out by the end of this month. Apparently they are demolishing all the houses [*“pingfang oy,”* he code switches with the Chinese word and Uyghur word for home, which in this context mean houses that are not multi-story apartment buildings] in the entire city in an attempt to “beautify” the city, and build a new and civilized city. Actually the compensation they are giving us is fair (*muwapiq*) and it’s enough that my family can afford to buy a new house in the city. We are planning to buy one in this Uyghur area. But for our neighbors who do not have Ürümchi *nopus*, they are out of luck because people who don’t have an Ürümchi *nopus* cannot buy or rent a house in the city anymore, even though they have lived here for 15 or 20 years, so they are all being sent back to their hometowns. I think the government has their own strategy which is to separate and disperse Uyghurs throughout Xinjiang and not let them congregate in their own district in the southern part of Ürümchi. So that’s what their real reasoning is.

But now that they are sending everyone back, there is no one that knows how to slaughter a sheep, so the meat prices jumped to 60 kuai per kilo. [laughing] isn’t that funny? Because

urbanites like [our mutual friend] and I don't know how to slaughter a sheep, so all the meat prices went up. [laughing] (2017 conversation)

This participant explained the situation from the perspective of a wealthy urbanite. Although his family lost income because their previous renting business is suffering with migration restrictions, the upcoming demolition did not affect his family to a large degree. Because they were homeowners and local *nopus* holders, they received compensation that allowed them to buy homes in the city. He seemed relatively optimistic and aware of his privilege and the discrepancy between himself and rural migrants. It is possible that he was more angry or upset than he was letting on during the conversation. He turned the eviction and incarceration of rural Uyghurs in their hometowns into a joke about how urbanites are unable to slaughter sheep, demonstrating the cultural divides between urban and rural Uyghurs. His homeownership status and urban *nopus* status allowed him to remain shielded from the worst of the military police state and displacement.

V. Conclusion

China as an authoritarian state controls ideological spheres with material effects, with an escalation that encroaches on spaces of autonomy and limits citizen freedoms leading to evictions from the city and incarceration in the countryside. I give insight into how and why Uyghurs experienced displacement during the crackdown of 2017, which shows that the suffocation of state power and economic dispossession worked together to limit and silence citizen freedom and prevent mobility, dictating people's location in time and space. Economic dispossession is a tool of authoritarian and settler colonial power, where unfettered access to neighborhood governance systems means uncontrolled access to affecting the Uyghurs' everyday lives. The chapter is about the *escalation* of the dispossession of Uyghur people of their land and livelihoods, evictions, demolitions. There was already a dispossession that happened in rural areas that led them to come to the city, then a second dispossession in the city. A third dispossession occurred through

demolition and eviction from the city in 2017, which contains three components: political-economy, state control, and race. While Chapter 4 tells the story of the bureaucracy, this chapter tells the story of what state power can do with that information and surveillance capability to displace and intern large amounts of people for the purpose of “safety.”

Settler colonialism occurs in Xinjiang where people are physically uprooted from their homeland to seek economic, cultural, and political survivance. Settler colonialism and development produce national landscapes, and when one group of people do not fit in with that landscape, they are displaced. The territorial state dispossesses rural poor minorities in economic, cultural, and political ways, which affects people’s lives. We witness the dispossession and displacement of a people from the livelihoods and homeland with undertones of ethnic cleansing. The homeowners were relatively protected in some ways, and they also experienced social difference because they often have a different class culture involving office work, not sheep herding and slaughtering. The different worlds between urban and rural influence their perception of and interaction with the government. While the wealthier urban class were perhaps more optimistic, saying “it could be worse,” the poor were resigned to saying, “That’s just how it is, *amal yoq.*” Neither group demonizes the government, and nobody here is supportive about the crackdown either. Their stories contrast with the stories of the ethnic majority Han, who tell their own grievances and hopes in the next chapter.

INTERLUDE

June 2017: I saw Li Tian today. We went out to dinner at a grilled fish restaurant. The dark circles under her eyes and slumped shoulders marked her exhaustion. “My neck is sore,” she complained. “I had to sleep sitting up last night during my 36-hour shift at the *shequ*.” She wore her work clothes, which was a black t-shirt with POLICE written in all caps and in English on the left breast pocket.

“Why does your work uniform say ‘police’ in English and not Chinese?”

“It’s because we’re not real police. We’re just *shequ* workers. The actual police would get mad if they were wearing shirts with 警察 [police in Chinese] on them.”

A phone call came in on Li Tian’s cell phone, and she rolled her eyes, putting the phone on silent.

“Ugh, someone from my *shequ* area is calling me, I really don’t feel like talking to them right now. I’ll call them back when I feel like it.

“A lot of people have lost hope in the government and are starting to hate the government, and they blame me,” Li Tian sighed.

“Did something happen at work today?” I asked.

Li Tian nodded and her eyes filled with tears.

“I don’t want to talk about work right now, things are rough right now,” she said shaking her head.

I nodded, but she continued.

“We are constantly having to get new materials from the residents, constantly asking if they have a passport, and they hate us for it. They curse at us, they are always thinking I am bad for the policies they don’t like. Anyway, I don’t want to do this job. I had a job that was part of the Western Development Plan that paid for my schooling, and afterward we have to work as part of the Plan for two years to help pay back our scholarship. I have no choice, I have to keep going. A lot of people are already quitting this job though.

I have to act really tough and serious and angry sometimes, yelling at people in my district to follow the rules. But sometimes I cry. The other day one of the shop owners cursed at me, just venting their frustrations about our regulations and our policies. So I got on the bus and I cried. It’s so hard, this job, sometimes. This one time, I had to shut down an elderly couple’s shop because they were using a stove that used coal. They cried and begged me, saying that if I shut down their shop, they would be left with nothing and no way to make money. I had no choice, my leader would have fired me if I hadn’t done it. I felt horrible that day. Sometimes I hate my job. But I know some people support me. I have to just believe that what I’m doing is right and for the good of the country.”

CHAPTER 7

HAN CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON XINJIANG: HOPE, OPPORTUNITY, AND INEQUALITY

“Development is the foundation of security, and security the precondition for development.” -Xi Jinping (from “New Asian Security Concept”)

Li Tian’s testimony in the interlude paints a picture of how the policies affected people in the Han community. Not only had police and *shequ* surveillance caused anger, resentment, and even destitution for the people the policies were intended to help, but also it challenged the loyalty to the state of the people who carried out the policies: Even Li Tian recognized that some of the regulations are harmful. Such measures created dissatisfaction among the population. Still, Li Tian was patriotic and earnestly believed that she was doing her best to serve the people. Even if the policy-makers had genuinely good intentions, the results carried unintended consequences of creating resentment and hurting business. While the government may have been responding to securing their legitimacy, they ended up creating additional problems. According to these respondents, the *shequ* carried a negative effect on businesses and the Han were not necessarily supporting the *shequ*. The government is not a monolithic entity, but made up of individuals who are just doing their job. Sometimes these are jobs that they might not like and one that they are obligated to fulfill based on financial or other circumstances.

This chapter is a study of increased police and security environment from the perspective of ethnic majority Han residents of Ürümchi, Xinjiang. The data provide a study of Han experiences in a frontier development zone. I use these data to examine inequalities through development in terms of the construction projects and government initiatives that have brought Han migrants to Xinjiang. I examine these development and policing *practices and discourses* as crucial components in shaping social relations (Martin 2018b).

While the literature has explained the oppression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, fewer studies have investigated the perspective of the Han in Xinjiang (Hansen 2005; Joniak-Luthi 2013). Cliff (2016), author of *Oil and Water: Being Han in Xinjiang*, is one of the few scholars to provide an ethnography of Han life in Xinjiang. He writes: “Common elements of the subjectivity of Han in Xinjiang relate directly to the three major themes of migration, empire, and time” (Cliff 2016, 208). He conducted interviews with government bureaucrats to better understand the role of China as a colonial power in Xinjiang. He argues that creating an appearance of violence and instability in Xinjiang keeps money from the central government flowing into the region. While the broad patterns of Xinjiang as a site of migration, empire, and time are recognized in his work, important details of the role of poor, Han rural migrants and small business owners in contrast to Uyghur life are neglected. I bring additional ethnographic details to Cliff’s (2016) and Hansen’s (2005) studies to better understand the experience of Han locals and migrants in the capital city of a colonial power.

In addition to illustrating the inequalities between Han and Uyghur residents of Ürümchi, I also highlight the struggles and grievances of poor Han, especially those from rural areas. In Xinjiang’s Han population, a certain level of complacency has been achieved through the promises of economic development, a rhetoric of peace and stability, as well as political domination, such

as through surveillance of media and Internet, as well as the mass incarceration of Muslim “terrorists” (Thum 2018). However, the Chinese government is encountering an economic slowdown (Han, Huang, and Zou 2016; Hong et al. 2017). China’s government has become more authoritarian since the presidency of Xi Jinping (Lampton 2017; Minzner 2018).

One of its methods of coercion to maintain control is mass incarceration of Uyghurs (e.g., Nebehay 2018). This incarceration is about obtaining regime legitimacy of consent from Han. Legitimacy from the Han is crucial, but legitimacy from the Uyghurs is ignored through a combination of economic development and dispossession in conjunction with Islamophobic discourses about safety and security. This chapter discusses the perspective of the Han on the economic situation in China, as well as Islamophobia associated with Uyghurs.

I beyond a monolithic image of the Han to depict a complex picture with multiple contradictory layers. Not all Han support the government nor the *shequ*, and many Han also have their own grievances against the government. The layers to this complex picture include the development discourses of progress and improvement, class inequalities and sufferings, and wide-ranging and conflicting opinions about the increasing policing situation. I discuss these elements in the empirical sections that follow.

I. Literature Review and Theory

A. Historical Background

The construction of minorities solidified the categorization of the Han ethnic group (Fei 1981; Gladney 1994; Millward 2007; Schein 2000; Leibold 2007). The creation of “ethnic minority” categories identified the minority *minzu* as objects of knowledge in opposition to the “Han Self,” which served as an important part of nation-building (Schein 2000; Mullaney 2010, 2012). Meanwhile, the spatial patterns of uneven development (West vs. East, Rural vs. Urban)

plays a major role in social formation in China, especially in understanding development as a value marker of social difference. While migrant-worker subjects are “uncivilized” in the eastern coastal cities, they are the harbinger of civilization to China’s ethnic minorities in their migration West (Nyiri 2006; Yeh 2013).

Recent Chinese state development discourses that reject the rural as backward and uncivilized mark a major shift in social relations from the Mao era that celebrated the rural (Yan 2008). The shift from state socialism to state capitalism fomented the formation of class differences and new social identities, especially the formation of the modern peasant-worker subject (Pun 2005). Discourses of economic development portray a linear path toward progress and modernity (Duara 1995). From conversations with people about how the building of new highways, buildings and other infrastructure manifested for them the signs of progress, I draw on economic development theories. While the dominant discourse presents the city as modern, progressive, developed, liberating, and empowering, the rural migrant workers I talked to share a different story, one of struggle and separation from family members.

The Chinese state is not a detached or neutral party, but rather deeply involved in shaping social formation. At the same time, social context deeply shapes state policy and practice in Xinjiang. The interview analysis explores Han Chinese reactions to state policy shaped around the ethnic strife in Xinjiang and the “safety” measures implemented to address it.

Since the *hukou* system restricts state welfare benefits to one’s place of registration in eastern China, rural *hukou* holders living in the city often lack affordable access to government services in the city, including subsidized housing, education, and healthcare (W. Wu 2004; G. Chen 2012b; Pong 2015). Previous studies document the extensive structural inequality and institutional discrimination encountered by rural migrant workers in urban China (Fan 2002; Chan

and Buckingham 2008; W. Wu and Wang 2014). For example, detailed studies on urban poverty in China provide evidence of housing inequality and socio-spatial segregation by neighborhood between migrants and locals (Pow 2009; J. Chen, Guo, and Wu 2011; S.-M. Li, Zhu, and Li 2012; He 2013).

Even through the marketization of the post-Mao era, the *hukou* system retains much of its institutional legacy for the purposes of labor exploitation (Solinger 1999; Pun 2005; Chan 2009). The state plays a key role in regulating and creating the workforce through *hukou* regulation (Solinger 1999; L. Zhang 2001). China's marketization thus must be understood in the context of their socialist institutions, such as the *hukou* (Fan 2004). The market economy works with the state's socialist legacy of the *hukou* system, and patriarchy, to exploit the vulnerabilities of rural migrants (especially women) living in cities (Pun 2005). Migrants are not passive agents of state and capital, however, as they exercise agency, resist oppression and engage in subject formation as modern, hard-working, and civilized peasant-workers (Solinger 1999; L. Zhang 2001; Pun 2005). I found some similarities between rural migrants in the literature and the people I spoke with in Xinjiang, namely the struggles of separation from family. However, *hukou* did not play a major role in my conversations with them. They did not bring it up unless I asked about it. When I did ask about it, they said that the *hukou* did not negatively affect their life, nor their access to hospitals or their child's education. As mentioned in the WeChat conversation in Chapter 4 about restricting rentals to minorities (see also Appendix B), a Han woman said, "This city doesn't restrict *hukou*." It seemed to be that Ürümchi did not have the same restrictions on incoming Han rural migrants that eastern, coastal cities have. The other major difference was that rural migrants sometimes stereotyped the people and place of Xinjiang as backwards and underdeveloped. Rural migrants I spoke to in Nanjing saw that city as more developed than their hometowns (see Tynen

2014, 2018). Han rural migrants in Xinjiang saw their destination as backwards, whereas in Nanjing the migrants saw their destination as progressive.

Complex dynamics create settler colonialism in Xinjiang. Colonization hurts both sides, but in very different and unequal and uneven ways. The Han also experienced conflicting situations and feelings, and also fell victim to the state's development projects. Ürümqi's terrible air pollution is one example, where the air was difficult to breathe for everyone and affected everyone in an embodied way. Birth control restrictions that limited Han families to one child and construction projects that displaced Han residents from their homes are other examples of state terror, but not colonization as state power plays out in Xinjiang. The stories told here illuminate the effects of urban/rural uneven development on Han settlers in Xinjiang. The data reveal development *discourses* and social difference between migrants in a frontier development zone that challenge a neat definition of a clear dichotomy between core and periphery. The core/periphery and urban/rural dichotomies as socially constructed and yet material realities shape lives and histories.

B. Legitimacy

In the Xinjiang context, discourses about Islamic terrorism naturalize the policing of Uyghurs as a seemingly inevitable step towards public safety (see Chapter 4 for a full discussion of this discourse in propaganda). Camp's (2016) case studies in *Incarcerating the Crisis* of incarceration of Black men in the United States illuminate how discourses of "criminals" and "safety" masquerade as color-blind and natural "common-sense" in neoliberal discourses in the midst of economic crisis: As Camp (2016, 5) writes: "Fears and class anxieties produced by capitalist restructuring were transformed into racist consent to security, law, and order" (Camp, 2016, 5). There are important differences between the United States and China, especially due to

a different history of slavery, and different discourses around race and neoliberalism. However, Camp's (2016) work is still useful in terms of analyzing the combination of economy, culture, and political domination to achieve legitimacy, which is relevant for the Han population in Xinjiang. Camp (2016) argues that common-sense hegemony of the dominant group around the racialization and criminalization of poverty justifies neoliberal state formation and solidifies the U.S.'s state legitimacy. Camp (2016) describes how the combination of consent and coercion work together in racial and security regimes to enforce racial and class domination. Camp shows that consent and coercion sometimes overlap and that the blurring of these categories illuminates how cultural hegemony functions.

Han Chinese consent to state rule in Xinjiang has been achieved through the promises of economic development, a rhetoric of peace and stability, as well as political domination (Cliff 2016). The common-sense of dominant ideology purports that Uyghurs should be grateful for the economic development that the Chinese have brought them. Uyghurs do not subscribe or adopt this idea, but Han people often talk about it and the discourse is also prevalent in Chinese media (e.g., "Xinjiang").

The story of the Uyghur and Han in Xianjing is about racism, as well as fears over insecurity and instability. China's economic slowdown is happening in conjunction with racist and Islamophobic discourses about safety and security. These are the same racial and security regimes that justify incarceration with threats to national security and public safety as a way to *depoliticize* and naturalize it as common-sense. The status quo is violently enforced consent and coercion through political domination that colonizes our imaginations—ideology and culture coming together so that we cannot conceive of a more just world. Instead, it suddenly seems natural that one should criminalize "terrorists" and be grateful for development.

What can explain the mass internment of Uyghurs in 2017-present? Camp (2016, 4) describes the ways in which regimes of cultural hegemony justify incarceration in the language of crime and safety “violently enforce consent.” Camp (2016, 11) writes that the “neoliberal state has deployed extensive coercive measures to ensure consent.” In other words, racism, economics, and state power function together to maintain hegemonic control. The neoliberal state depoliticizes the incarceration as necessary and justified. This chapter reveals the Han majority perspectives in the city before and during the incarceration of Uyghurs in the city.

One cannot understand the mass incarceration of Uyghurs without understanding the insecurity of impoverished Han migrants. The incarceration of Uyghurs is about a combination of economic insecurity for the Han happening in conjunction with racist discourses about safety and security. These are the same racial and security regimes that justify incarceration with threats to national security and public safety.

Security remains a central theme in understanding ruling legitimacy. First, the Han could be anxious about their own possible dispossession, and anxious about their own tenuous claims to land (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Legitimacy is achieved through coercion and consent, where common-sense beliefs about the benefits of development and the dangers of terrorism become naturalized. The government will do anything to keep them pacified, and a rhetoric of safety, civilized cities, service and care, and development is how they achieve it (Cliff 2016). Inequality along ethnic and class lines constructs the material and cultural landscape, life in the city, and social relations.

II. Social Context of the Han in Xinjiang

A. Setting the Scene: Northern Ürümqi, in a Han-majority district

From the eight-lane overpasses to the neat rows of skyscrapers glittering in the sunlight, Ürümchi clamored with momentum as people rushed through the streets (see Figure 7.1).



Figure 7.1: Skyline of downtown Ürümchi. *Source:* Photo by author, October 2014.

Flashing neon lights and hugely garish electronic billboards pulsed with energy and the promise for a better future, advertising tea that helps one get to sleep, the newest smartphone, the best laptop computer, Gucci bags and Swatch watches (see Figure 7.2).



Figure 7.2: An image of the billboards in downtown Ürümqi. *Source:* Photo by author, October 2014.

Messages on the walls of construction sites encouraged passersby to be civilized members of a civilized city. Walls of concrete and steel surrounded the sidewalks covered by highway overpasses of whizzing cars and rumbling busses. Vehicles weaved in and out of the lanes trying to find their place on the road and get ahead of the cars in front of them (see Figure 6.3). The endless parade of cars and busses speeding past created an ambience of busyness: “I am busy, you are busy, and therefore we are worthy.”



Figure 7.3: A view of one of the main intersections in downtown Ürümqi. *Source:* Photo by author, October 2014.

Rushing into the underground walkway to get to the other side of the street, people bumped into one another as they tried to get to their destination one second earlier. The underground walkway was lined with shops selling milk tea, Taiwanese snacks, underwear, manicures, and fried chicken. Some people were shopping, playing on their iPhones, and taking selfies. Security guards waved wands against bags. The metal detectors beeped, but nobody stops or gets stopped.

With a closer look, the consequences of urbanization and development became a little clearer: bags were thick and dark under people's eyes, wrinkles creased their forehead, shoulders slumped and spines rounded, legs limped, and hips waddled from pain. An elderly grandmother picked plastic bottles out of the trash for pennies. A young woman played on her phone a little too

often because she was posting pictures of her daughter thousands of miles away on her social media page. When asked about their children and their parents, I learned that they are separated from their closest family members. Their eyes screamed desperation and desire for dreams and hope for the future. Behind the glint of hope, the exhaustion of barely surviving leaked out in despair. When spending time in the Han-majority sections of the north part of town, one would probably never guess that this is a city with deep-seated ethnic problems. In many ways, northern Ürümchi felt on the surface similar to a typical Chinese city. In order to dig below this surface, the story of development and policing from the perspective of ethnic majority Han citizens of Ürümchi, both migrants and locals, also needs to be told.

B. Social Context of the Han in Xinjiang

Most Han see Xinjiang not as homeland, but as economic opportunity. For most of the interviews with 29 Han people I interviewed who grew up in Xinjiang, the interviewee mentioned at least once: “My hometown (*laojia*) is in the inner provinces (*neidi*), but I’ve never been there [or I’ve only visited a few times]. I just know my grandparents came to Xinjiang from there.” Conversations around the location of one’s *laojia*, literally “old home,” came up in the beginning of the interview when I asked people where they were from and requested that they list their *laojia*. They would almost always ask for me to clarify what I meant by *laojia*: their ancestral home, where they were born, or where they grew up and went to school? I always asked them to give a little background and explanation. Their responses reflected the colonial nature of Xinjiang as a foreign territory. Take for instance the following conversation from an interview, where the ellipses signal pauses in the conversation:

My hometown...I’m Xinjiangese (*Xinjiangren*)...My hometown is...Actually...How do I explain this...In Xinjiang...My birthplace is different from my hometown (*laojia*). I was born in [a *bingtuan* city in Xinjiang], it’s about [X] kilometers from Ürümchi. My home (*jia*) is in

[*bingtuan* city], but... my parents' hometowns are in Shandong and Jiangsu, which is where I would probably locate my *laojia*.

For those people who grew up in Xinjiang, most from infancy, they do identify Xinjiang as their “home” (*jia*) and identify as “Xinjiangese” (*Xinjiangren*), but they do not identify Xinjiang or Ürümchi as their *laojia*, because for Han Chinese people the *laojia* is connected to ancestral homeland. The Han participants' hesitation over how to define home and hometown illustrates a lack of connection to Xinjiang as homeland, which underlies the colonial logics of Xinjiang as a frontier or new territory.

Ürümchi is tainted with the blood stains of deadly riots in July 5, 2009 when 200 to 600 people were killed over the course of three days. This incident, referred to by Chinese speakers simply as “7/5” (*qiwu*) was brought up in virtually every interview with Han Chinese participants, who spoke to how the city has changed since then. The emerging narrative revealed that Ürümchi has not been the same since ethnic relations significantly worsened after that incident. Economic development and inter-ethnic relations were actually quite good up until then, they said, and inter-ethnic friendships were common before 2009. Another major change in the city that people noticed since 2009 was that there used to be plenty of morning and night markets. The markets were completely nonexistent because they were eliminated for “safety” reasons: clearing poor Uyghur migrants from the city and eliminating congregating space. As a result, commodities, especially food, had gotten a lot more expensive, they said.

For example, one Han man in his late twenties said, “Ever since 7/5, things have gotten so awkward (*ganga*) between us and Uyghurs. For example, they have intense security checks at the gas stations and such. Uyghurs are just so hard to get along with. With the language situation, it's hard to communicate with them.” Another young woman said during her interview in regards to her feelings about Ürümchi: “The ethnic solidarity (*minzu tuanjie*) discourse is all talk and no

action. The government wants us to be like a pomegranate [laughing] and all come together and unite, but the reality is that ever since 7/5, the *minzu* relationships have been very distant.”¹²² Many research participants witnessed people killing and being killed. For the Han, the explanation for the July 5th riots were that a few Uyghur terrorists had been brainwashed by foreigners and the terrorists had paid poor Uyghurs to join them.

The Han interviewee framing and stereotypes around Uyghurs often objectified and differentiated Uyghurs from the Han. Besides the negative stereotypes regarding some Uyghurs as dangerous terrorists, these objectifying stereotypes were mostly positive. Han people often described the people of Xinjiang as friendly. Take for example the words of one young woman: “When you have a lot of different ethnicities and different types of lifestyles all living together, you get a good feeling and feel trust towards one another.” One young man said, “I like the cultural environment (*renwen huanjing*) here. I like the minorities. The minorities have special characteristics that Han people don’t have and they’re more friendly.” Ignorance of Uyghur culture and Islamic traditions was common among Han participants. Han narratives often reduced Uyghurs to either their culture, especially food, dress, and music, or else terrorism and crime. Han were also often ignorant of the way Uyghurs struggled through poverty and discrimination as ethnic minorities, and often insisted, “I have lots of minority friends!” The reality was, however, as many noted, that the city would never be the same after 7/5 (see “Timeline” 2009 for more information on what happened during the riots).

The neighborhoods of Ürümchi are highly segregated. For Uyghurs, the reason for the ethnic separation by neighborhoods was historical, social, and practical: Uyghur families had

¹²² As mentioned in Chapter 1, the government propaganda around the city encouraged people to “hug each other like pomegranate seeds.”

always lived in that part of town, they were close to their friends and family, and had access to Halal food in their own part of town. For the Han, the segregation was less easy to accept: “I don’t understand why they have this need to live in a separate part of town, it would be better if we all lived mixed-in together. Take for example, the girls. They are beautiful but they will never even consider dating a Han boy. It’s all because of their religion,” one male interviewee in his late twenties said, laughing, shaking his head, and clicking his tongue.

One way that cultural and social ignorance arose was in the Han participants’ complaints about rights and discrimination. Often they did not recognize the Uyghurs’ disadvantages or their own privilege. Instead, the Han seemed more concerned about their own struggles. Some expressed grievances against the government. Ten of the 45 Han interviewees (both urban locals, rural migrants, and the categories in-between) had narratives that spoke to historical grievances, such as, “My family was really poor and we struggled a lot under Mao’s government while working in Xinjiang and/or in our hometown.” This was slightly different from other conversations I had heard in other parts of China. Many Han in China had been forcibly relocated there during the Cultural Revolution or otherwise as punishment, and they carried the stories of this suffering to me. Fifteen out of the 45 Han that I interviewed complained or carried grievances against the post-reform government, from bankrupt factories to local governments taking over rural land. Others complained about lack of freedom of speech and too much government control over businesses.

As an example of the complaints about discrimination, most Han people from Xinjiang (see Chapter 2 for demographic details of the interviewees) complained about “discrimination”¹²³ in the inner provinces for being from Xinjiang without recognizing the structural inequalities of

¹²³ Ch: 歧视 *qishi*

prejudice and the way that it affected Uyghur people. The following is a conversation with a male police officer in his thirties who was born in Xinjiang.

Hotels in *neidi* won't accept people from Xinjiang. Now that's discrimination. It's so unfair. It's the same at the airport. I always have to take my shoes off! Same with anyone flying with Xinjiang on their ID. They always say to me, 'Hello Sir, you've been chosen for the special VIP lane.' [laughing] They say, 'we want to make you more convenient and comfortable and also you have to take your shoes off!' But they actually just want to check me. It happens every single time I fly. Actually it's not a VIP lane, they should just call it the 'discrimination lane' (*qishi tongdao*)! [laughing] (2017 conversation)

The narrative that Han from Xinjiang are also discriminated against reflects a dismissal and ignorance of the larger structural oppression and institutional discrimination that follows minorities in ways that the majority will never be able to understand or experience. Not being able to stay in hotels in other parts of China or needing to go through extra security checks at the airport is certainly frustrating, but their complaints reveal unintentional ignorance of the full extent of what ethnic minorities, especially Uyghurs, experience on a daily basis. The participants also portray ignorance of the privilege of educational and professional opportunities available to them in cases where discrimination is more than an annoyance, but also influences one's life trajectory.

To give additional context to how the Han experienced this type of discrimination, I also specifically draw from repeating narratives of the 19 interviewees who grew up in Xinjiang, but had at one point spent significant time (more than 6 months) living outside of Xinjiang for school or work: "I felt excluded from the Shanghainese due to language and cultural differences [i.e. not being able to speak the local dialect]." Many of the Han interviewees who had left Xinjiang talked about the discrimination they experienced where Xinjiang was stereotyped as backward: Laughed at for riding camels to school, for example, or otherwise ostracized due to their origins in Xinjiang, looked down upon as backward or unqualified, and never feeling like they belonged in the Inner

Provinces (*neidi*). One young woman in her early twenties working on her master's degree who had grown up in rural Xinjiang said:

The one bad thing about living and going to school in Xinjiang is that you suffer a type of discrimination. If you want to go work in *neidi*, they don't consider your degree or your credentials to be valid. If you take a test, you have to re-take the test in *neidi*. That happened to my sister. She moved to Chongqing and they didn't consider her degree from Xinjiang to be valid. They just think that everything from Xinjiang is not good. People from *neidi* who have never been here think that we are all really backwards. There is a joke that people always say, "Xinjiang is all desert, do you ride camels to school?" They say it as a joke, but actually it is kind of a discrimination (*qishi*). It's only people who have come here know that Ürümqi is actually really developed, more developed than some parts of the countryside in *neidi*. Of course the development is a little slower, but it's not as bad as people think. (2017 interview)

In another example, one young woman in her late twenties who worked in media and production for Xinjiang TV said, "I grew up in Xinjiang and it was only after I moved to Harbin for college that I experienced prejudice against people from Xinjiang. The usual stuff: airport security, hotels won't let you stay there, people thinking you are a terrorist or backward or grew up in a desert with camels." This reflects some of the prejudice against outsiders that people in the rest of China (in *neidi*) feel. The stereotypes of terrorism in Xinjiang affect the Han majority and ethnic minorities. This young man speaks to an experience common to many other rural Han migrants in the eastern coastal cities:

I didn't fit in. I wasn't used to the weather and the food. People in Beijing are pretty insular, they don't like outsiders (*waidiren*)—they are always very suspicious and resentful of them. I also lived in Guangzhou for a while, and there they always speak in their dialect and exclude anyone who doesn't speak Cantonese. People in *neidi* think that we ride on camels to school, but if only they came here to see for themselves, then they would know that Ürümqi is almost just as developed as many places in *neidi*.

These narratives of linear development lay the foundation for key social context in understanding the development discourse narratives that follow. In the rest of China, Xinjiang is stereotyped as extremely backward, and part of the Han narrative exhibited an insistent effort to explain to me, a foreigner, that Ürümqi was not backward but actually quite developed. The narratives from rural

migrants coming from *neidi* were different, however, and they sometimes talked about how they thought Xinjiang was backward. A waitress in her late twenties told me during an interview:

Xinjiang is really backwards. Take for example, the clothes that people wear, everything is really out [of fashion] and ugly. Not like in Sichuan. In Sichuan people are really fashionable, they wear the latest clothing styles just like Americans and Europeans. But here the clothes are really ugly and weird looking. That's just an example of the way that this place is really backward. In general, the development is just really far behind Sichuan, the people, their fashion, their behavior, and the environment.

Her evidence is visible, rather than structural. The experience and perspective of Xinjiang depended on if you grew up in Xinjiang or in *neidi*. When describing the experiences of the Han participants, I will indicate where they grew up to provide context for their life experiences. In conclusion, the deadly July 5th riots (“7/5”) and experiences of discrimination shape the background social context for the interview themes on development and policing that follow.

III. Development

A. Linear Narratives of Progress and Settler Colonialism: “Xinjiang is a place with opportunities to make money”

While the political-economic situation in China is complex, the following is a synoptic explanation. Some Han were left behind by economic development, especially in rural areas. The rural areas were abandoned and farmers were in desperate need for wage labor in the cities. However, the cities soon became crowded. Labor supply outpaced demand. They were left with few other options to feed their families, some Chinese citizens, Han and minority, moved out West to Xinjiang to seek employment. When discussing Xinjiang's development and the interviewees' reason for living in Xinjiang, the Chinese word “*neidi*” (or, “inner provinces” or “inland”) was a repeating keyword for Han participants when referring to “mainland” China. The *neidi* is used to refer to everywhere in China except Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, and Tibet. In this section, I will

explore the term “*neidi*” with all the complex connotations that it implies—developed, competition, crowded—as opposed to Xinjiang as a development frontier.

While the diverse demographic of the interviewees ranged widely from poor rural migrants to wealthy locals, all of them had opinions about how Xinjiang and Ürümchi compared to other places in China. The general consensus was that Ürümchi was positioned somewhere in the middle of wealthy, eastern cities, and poor, rural areas: that the city of Ürümchi was relatively developed (i.e. in terms of construction, transportation, education) compared to the rural countryside of *neidi*. However, many interviewees added, Ürümchi cannot compare (*bibuliao*) to the advancement of *neidi* cities in terms of development. One man in his early twenties said, “Ürümchi is no *neidi*, but it’s actually quite well developed. Not like Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou, or Chongqing, but more developed than a lot of other places in *neidi*.” When I asked participants to be specific about what they meant by development (*fazhan*), they often responded with examples of transportation infrastructure, including highways, bridges, and public transport. For example, they used the example that Ürümchi did not have a subway as a reason for its underdevelopment when compared to *neidi* cities. They also cited educational quality and opportunities, and level of technology and building infrastructure such as the presence of skyscrapers when comparing its development to *neidi* cities. They reproduced a linear discourse of progress.

The respondents had different impressions of the city. For everyone, the main reason for living in Ürümchi was: “Xinjiang is a place with opportunities to make money.” From there, their discourses diverged due to their level of class privilege, often rooted in rural or urban origins. First, I will speak to a relatively privileged class of urbanites who spoke about office jobs and housing prices. Second, I will discuss the experiences of rural migrant workers in the service or manual labor industries.

B. Theme 1: “Ürümchi is better than the cities in neidi because there are more job opportunities with comparatively higher salaries and cheaper housing.”

This theme was repeated by about half of the 45 interviewees. Han participants said that they were encouraged by economic development logics, possibly bolstered by government subsidies, to move to and stay in Xinjiang (Cliff 2009; Dautcher 2009). Their narratives reflected a discourse of linear progress of development, and reflected the market saturation in large cities in eastern China, where they said it was hard to find work. Take for example Li, a man in his mid-twenties who grew up in Ürümchi:

I lived in Beijing for a couple years after college and worked as an office manager at a software company. I didn't like it. People from *neidi* are very outstanding (*youxiu*) and hard-working. People there work so hard for so little money! The salaries are lower even though the housing prices are very high, much higher than here. It was very tough (*xinku*). Also, everyone is very skilled and experienced, so the competition for jobs is really high. I came back to Ürümchi to work as a personal trainer and I like it a lot better here. (2017 interview)

Li touches on the economic pressure facing many eastern coastal cities such as Beijing: Labor market saturation where salaries have plummeted while housing prices have risen in the crowded cities. Li sounds existential about a different lifestyle and different attitudes toward work. But Ürümchi is different, provides a relief from the expectation to crush oneself with work. Li had the option to return to Xinjiang and live with his parents while he pursued his personal training career. His relative privilege contrasted with others who spoke about having no other options. Another young man grew up in Ürümchi, had his Master's degree in statistics and computer engineering, and worked as a website editor for a local media company. His family was not wealthy, but had the resources to send him to obtain higher education in a technical field. He explained: “I'm used to the life—the people and the food—here, so I came back here from Nanjing. I couldn't get used to living in Nanjing, the working environment was competitive and the salary wasn't very satisfying. Plus, the housing is too expensive there. I plan to stay here in Xinjiang.” His job was

relatively relaxed, he explained, and he did not really have to worry about job security in Ürümchi. He notes the work atmosphere in addition to the economics. While the economic issue might “naturalize” the work ethic, the dynamics of Xinjiangese Han people moving to eastern China reflect culture and atmosphere as well as economic decisions.

His relative class privilege showed that he was able to take advantage of the job opportunities in the tech field to find a job and save for a house, a luxury that only the middle-class and above could afford. Another man in his forties, Lu Xiyang, who had grown up in Ürümchi and worked as a project manager at a telecom company said:

The houses are cheaper when compared to *neidi*, and some job opportunities are easier to get here. All in all, I consider this place my home (*jia*) and I wouldn't want to move to *neidi* where the lifestyle is too fast pace and the pressure is so great. Even though we have some terrorist problems and other things like that, I still would prefer to live here than anywhere else. (2017 interview)

Ongoing economic pressure in the eastern coastal cities among the Han was a big issue. However, it is more than simply economics and also includes a discussion of culture and lifestyle with less stress and pressure. Xinjiang provides a release valve for the pressure. Some people, usually those from a more privileged class viewed the city of Ürümchi as a land of opportunity, self-improvement, advancement, cheap housing, and higher salaries due to the crowded conditions in eastern China. This is one cause of the logics of settler colonialism, where people feel encouraged to move to the “virgin territory ripe for development” due to crowded conditions and market saturation, but also a more relaxed work atmosphere. In other words, they wanted to move for the opportunities, but also the lifestyle. It also suggests that the Chinese government is aware that Xinjiang can relieve *neidi* of some of its overcrowding and encourages people to move there to alleviate some of the pressure and keep the forward pace of GDP growth and economic growth through construction and other economic development projects (Cliff 2016). Economic growth is

key for the CCP to maintain political legitimacy in an authoritarian state. However, this means that with more incoming Han migrants and Han people who want to stay in Xinjiang, that they need space and opportunities for the incoming Han.

Finally, the economic growth narrative in the lives of the Han participants explains the divergence from the Uyghur experience of the city. Whereas Uyghurs saw Xinjiang as connected to homeland and family and did not report feelings of hope or opportunity as connected to Xinjiang, Han saw it more as a place of hope with opportunities to make money but did not see it as connected to homeland.

When speaking about why they lived in Ürümqi, Han also spoke about access to leisure space that highlighted class and ethnic divides. For the Han, one repeating theme was, “There are lots more fun things to do in the city now, especially when compared to before.” This was often in response to the question, “How has Ürümqi changed in the last five to ten years?” or “What do you think are some of the positive and negative effects of urban development on Ürümqi?” Leisure spaces were a luxury that many Han said they enjoyed about Ürümqi and the changes that urban development has brought. Expansion of and access to leisure space is a reflection of the development trajectory in Ürümqi, where growth of the service industry is a function of the higher salaries of government and security workers. Those workers were encouraged to move out west, not only to secure the territory for China, but also to put some population relief on the overcrowding in eastern China.

Over-the-top gluttony and obvious class divides were clear whenever I spent time with wealthier Han friends in the northern part of town. One day, a friend and I stepped inside the Parkson Mall and went up to the “Delicious Food Market” on the fourth floor. We were greeted by over-eager restaurant workers trying to get our attention, calling out the specials and the kinds

of food they have, holding menus open for us to look at and passing out coupons. We grabbed a coupon for one free kilo of fish, and went into a spicy fish hot pot restaurant. Almost every table was taken, but we were lucky to find an empty table with a view of the pagoda on Red Mountain. The waiter was over-eager and friendly, practically yelling out the selections for the day and our options. The menu was full of expensive steaks, fresh lamb, and chicken, as well as every kind of fish pot flavor one can imagine: spicy, sweet and sour, spicy and sour, and pickled vegetables. The restaurant was full of families with young children, who were either screaming or completely engrossed in a game on their cell phone. Moms and Dads were on their day off, trying to relax and escape with an afternoon out at a nice restaurant, ignoring their kids and trying to hold a conversation, or else staring at their phones. We relished in the delicacy of eating too much and the spicy and sour taste of the pickled vegetables and fresh fish. We complained how full we are as our stomachs bloated in fullness and we felt sleepy. Outside, a war was going on—The People’s War on Terror—but we tried to forget it for a moment, along with everyone else who was hoping an expensive meal will make them feel special and luxurious for a moment in an otherwise cold and unfriendly city.

I included this vignette here because leisure spaces, such as expensive hot pot restaurants were a key part of social life and cultural landscape for wealthier Han in the city, who were often civil servants or in the security industry. Leisure space is not only an escape for those working and living in a place they did not like, but also barred access to entry from the poor. The respondents don’t seem to explicitly want to exclude poor people. It seems that these spaces operate according to different norms than the workplace or street, and it brings them relief. The discussion of class divisions is my interpretation of the data, not my participants’ own words on it. They did not use the word “class” to describe socioeconomic inequality.

For example, one young master's degree student in his early thirties who grew up in Ürümchi said,

Without development, there would be no skiing, no movie theaters, no concerts like we have now. Our lives have completely changed since I was younger. When I was younger, the city was about a fourth the size that it is now and the largest building was eight-stories high. The roads were narrow and it was inconvenient to go anywhere. We didn't have a lot of food choices, for example when I was small we couldn't find pineapples or bananas, and in the winter there was no fresh food to be had. Starting from 1995, there was a big change when they started developing Ürümchi as a city with skyscrapers and highways, and development the service industry. Now our city is full of more and better job opportunities than a lot of places in *neidi*. Now there are lots more movie theaters, bars, clubs, and restaurants than there used to be.

According to the people I talked to, the changes of the last 10 years were significant. Participants who grew up in Xinjiang or had spent more than 10 years there frequently noted major development changes in their interviews. Most looked favorably on these changes. Economic development such as the growth of the service industry and luxuries such as entertainment and leisure are key aspects of economic growth. Leisure spaces were also key for keeping the Han happy who might otherwise not enjoy Xinjiang. It was clear when I hung out with Han people that having fun by going out skiing, eating, drinking, and otherwise entertaining was a key part of their lives when they otherwise often hated their jobs, especially for those in the government sector. However, for Uyghurs, it was different. One female Uyghur interviewee in her early forties said, "Since 2009, the morning and night bazaars have been shut down, so the city is not as lively as it used to be." Increased security in the Uyghur neighborhoods meant that most of their accessible and public cultural spaces and leisure spaces had been eliminated (see also Chapter 4 and 5 for a more detailed discussion on the Uyghur situation).

Relatively privileged Han people live in Xinjiang to access cheaper housing, higher salaries, and access to leisure spaces. Development discourses affect social life in Xinjiang and its further trajectory, where linear development discourses of progress are reproduced. This is not surprising

given the trajectory of other colonial powers, where high salaries and leisure spaces are utilized by the colonizers as justification and tools to keep the colonizers happy and satisfied in the frontier development zone, as population is a key aspect of territory. For poor Han, the experience was also different: they did not talk about luxuries such as leisure time and homeownership.

C. Theme 2: “Ürümchi is better than the countryside because here there are more job opportunities, but I miss my family and make just barely enough money to eat.”

The following scene provides a description to bridge from the “over-the-top gluttony” of the wealthy to a better understanding of the rural migrant workers who staff the restaurants for the rich. The following scene took place at an upscale hot pot restaurant in northern Ürümchi.

The workers in restaurants and hotels sometimes appeared to be robotic, ready to serve and respond back in affirmation to anything the customer says, gliding from one work station to another. I wondered how they keep smiles on their faces and remain enthusiastic. They appeared to be not tired at all, but in fact excited to be there. “Welcome to honor us with your presence!” (*huanying guanglin!*) They yelled a little too loudly, a little too in-sync to be natural. Maybe the synchronized dances they do every morning worked. “Okay, immediately,” (*hao de, mashang*) they loudly said to every request. Their make-up was flawless, making their skin appear as white as snow. Their eyeliner was perfectly applied and lipstick the perfect shade and lips the perfect shape. It was characteristic of Chinese chains and large corporations, a feeling of computer robotics. But I caught one of the girls smiling at one of the boys and I knew they have their own internal dramas as I knew ZY [one of my research participants] had with her fellow workmates. (2017 fieldnotes)

This description of an upscale hot pot restaurant in Ürümchi reflects the life of the migrant worker, who work 12 hours a day, every day. The migrant workers I spoke to described their work as “*dagong*,” which literally means “work,” but is distinct from doing business or office work and carries a connotation of manual and temporary labor.¹²⁴ “*Dagong*” was a major repeating word in Han migrant communities. “*Dagong*” was a specific description of the dirty, physically laborious, almost slave-wage labor that many “peasants” (*nongmin*) were subject so. *Dagong* was used to

¹²⁴ The word was distinct from “doing business” (*zuo shengyi*) and “work” (*gongzuo*), and certainly different from “off to work” (*shangban*), which carried the connotation of going to an office.

describe a common sight in Xinjiang: Groups of over 20 Han men standing near construction sales warehouses in the middle of winter, with white puffs of smoke coming out of their mouths, shoulders tense and rubbing their hands together, with big plastic buckets, paint scroll brushes, and signs saying “renovation” (*zhuangxiu*) with a list of things that they could do: plumbing, window installation, wall painting, plaster. *Dagong* meant, as Xiao Lin told me when I asked her to define it for me, “You can’t make money” (*bu neng zhuan qian*), which she explained meant you are making just enough to eat and not enough to save. For Chen Yuan, a foot massage therapist, however, it meant “you don’t make enough to be full” (*chi bu bao*), which for her meant leaving Ürümqi to find another job. Li Hua, a waitress in her early twenties from rural Shandong, used the word “*dagong*” in contempt:

I came here to *dagong*, even though I didn’t want to and I miss my daughter. I came here, but only found jobs paying under livable wages. [shakes head] I hate it here [Ürümqi]. I don’t want to go somewhere else because everywhere is the same. It’s not like we’re going to be able to find higher wages or better conditions somewhere else, in *neidi* it’s even harder to find a job. So we might as well just stay here where we have jobs right now rather than waste time and money trying to find another job where the salary might be even lower. It’s not easy to *dagong* in China right now, our villages have no work, no jobs, there is no money to be made, how else are we supposed to support our families, our children, my daughter? We have no choice (*mei banfa*). You want to know why I’m still here working (*dagong*) even though I’m not making any money? Because I have no other choice. There is no other option if I want to eat. At least it’s enough to feed myself and my family. But I am planning on getting out of here, going back home, finding work in my hometown, being with my daughter. Maybe I can find something a little closer to home. Because I really hate it here. Everything about it. I would rather go back home, and I will do that if I can. (2017 interview)

These narratives also came with a double-sided story of pain and suffering due to the hardship of the jobs they worked, their low salaries, and separation of families. Their hardship narratives were accompanied by stories of the countryside where only elders and children remained. Xinjiang was seen more than before as a land of hope and opportunity, but not without its struggles and hardship for those coming from the countryside.

I experienced the following incident at a local Chinese medicine foot massage parlor where I often sat to conduct participant observation. Pang Ge was smoking a cigarette while frying a pan emanating vigorous sizzling and scents of spicy chili peppers. He was standing on the small balcony where a one range propane stove has been set up. He stuck his head in to the room where I was sitting on a plush recliner chair. “Sorry, we haven’t eaten lunch yet and I’m the only one that can cook,” he said with a wide and friendly smile. “No, go ahead,” I said and returned to my book. He emerged, his pot belly pressing against the fabric of his polo shirt and his round cheeks protruding to his eyes as he smiles. He served lunch to his co-workers, speaking in the Sichuan dialect, and returned to the room, clapping his hands and stretching his arms out. “Ready now,” he said, and laughed. Pang Ge’s accent was a blending of sounds and a different symphony of tones than in Mandarin. He laughed and looked down at his shoes, apologizing to me: “I don’t really speak Mandarin (*putonghua*). Your Mandarin is better than mine! It’s because I didn’t go to high school, and in my village all the teachers and everyone just speaks the dialect, so I grew up that way. I never learned Mandarin.” When he talked with his co-workers, he switched back into his dialect, and I stopped being able to understand, only able to pick out a few words and phrases similar to the Nanjing dialect. He turned back to me, again apologizing, “Our dialect is so unpleasant to listen to (*nanting*), isn’t it?” I tried to tell him that I think it’s beautiful, but he just laughed again. As we continued our conversation in Mandarin, he told me a little bit more about his life: “I came here for work because the salary was better than what I could get in my hometown [in rural Sichuan], but now business is poor and I’m thinking about leaving Xinjiang. I’m divorced now, but I miss my daughters back home.” His story was not uncommon. Another foot massage therapist in her early thirties from rural Sichuan told me:

There are a lot of people from Sichuan here, because in Sichuan there are too many people, and we can’t make money there (*zhuanbudao qian*). All of the young people are outside working

(*dagong*), and the elders are at home taking care of the kids. I finished middle school and then I left home and started working. I did all kinds of different things, construction work, factory work. I started this foot massage thing six years ago because the salary was a little higher. This is not my favorite, it's just something to do so I can fill my stomach and fill my children's stomachs. Us workers (*dagong ren*)? That's all we can hope for. (2017 interview)

For many Han migrants moving to Xinjiang, they moved there out of desperation, and still struggled to make ends meet while separated from their children. Consider the following interview one of my research participants, a young woman from rural Sichuan in her early twenties working as a waitress. While we were talking, she did not put down her phone. She constantly scrolled through social media, responded to messages, or answered phone calls. I knew from following her on social media that she was frequently posting videos of her one-year old daughter back home, while asking anyone if they know of any job opportunities in Sichuan. In the middle of our conversation, she apologized while excusing herself to attend to a customer who is checking out and needs a receipt:

I really miss my daughter, but I have no choice (*mei banfa*), I can't not come out to work. I wouldn't say that the salaries are higher, nor that the opportunities are any better here than any other city. The cost of living is a little cheaper here and the salaries are a little higher here than in rural Sichuan though. But it really depends on where you are living and what kind of food you are buying things like that. I wouldn't say that I can save a little bit of money by living and working here rather than in Sichuan. Living everywhere and doing any kind of job is hard to make money on these days. These days, all of us can't make any money (*zhuan bu dao qian*). (2017 interview)

She claimed that she lives and works in Xinjiang to make enough money to feed herself and her child. Rural migrants' narratives were accompanied by hardship, struggle, and separation of families. However, she insisted that salaries and opportunities in Xinjiang, while not necessarily better than anywhere else, were slightly better than rural Sichuan. Her story revealed a divergent narrative from those from Xinjiang who claimed that the opportunities and salaries in Xinjiang were plentiful. Nevertheless, clearly she was speaking to a narrative that reflect urbanization and the economic slowdown in the rest of China that was encouraging more Han to move to Xinjiang.

Consider a quote from a restaurant worker in Ürümchi, a middle-aged woman who opened a dumpling restaurant with her husband:

We're from Hangzhou. We've been here for three years. We moved out here with our son in search of job opportunities. *Neidi* is so crowded! It's so hard to find a job. But the market isn't very good here either. But we heard that there are business opportunities here, so we opened up this restaurant. Business is alright—not good, but not bad either. I don't like it or not like it—it's just a job opportunity, a way to eat until I'm full (*chi bao*). (2017 interview)

For the rural migrants moving to Ürümchi from the countryside in other parts of China, their narratives were not necessarily full of hope or opportunity like those from Xinjiang with wealthier backgrounds. Also, these narratives did not talk about the cost of housing. Many in the working class admitted that they could not afford to buy a house in Ürümchi either. While the wealthier participants spoke of buying a house in Ürümchi, rural migrants did not, but instead spoke of just making enough to eat. The class inequality that divides Han Chinese people from other Han Chinese, are often along urban/rural divides related to differences in access to education. This was similar in some ways to the experiences of Han migrants in eastern Chinese cities.

This is not only a story of the differences in the Han and Uyghur experience in Ürümchi, but also the difference between poor Han migrants and wealthier Han residents of Xinjiang. The wealthier residents benefitted from the higher salaries in technology or government sectors. In other words, class divisions played an important role in determining the life outcomes and trajectories of people in Xinjiang. The interview responses were divided over those who had lived for long periods of time in cities and those who moved to Ürümchi from the countryside. While those who moved from the countryside admitted their salaries were better in Xinjiang, they often spoke of how hard it was to make money and their struggles with family separation. One woman from rural Gansu who worked in a nail salon and moved to Xinjiang when her husband was recruited to be a police officer in Ürümchi said, “If I could choose, I would definitely not live here.

What good would living here be if I had the option? There's nothing for me here. It's just lonely you know? I don't have many friends and no family out here." Meanwhile, those from more privileged and urban backgrounds spoke of Xinjiang as a land of hope and opportunity. However, both narratives come back to the theme of "Xinjiang is a place to make money," which diverged from Uyghur narratives that spoke of Xinjiang in terms of homeland, but often spoke of wanting to leave due to hopeless situation and oppressive conditions in the city.

First, job saturation and crowding in urban areas encourages movement to virgin, frontier lands. Second, the underlying economic logic behind settler colonialism seeks to take over land, move out and eliminate the existing populations, and uses populations as a territorial mode of control. Moving Han people out to Xinjiang and keeping them there is clearly a state effort and strategy to secure that land and territory for further economic development, including mining and construction, as well as a hub for the Belt-Road Initiative, and a buffer zone between Central Asia and China. These ideas do not exist in a vacuum, but rather are situated in networks and structures of geopolitical strategy and economic development. The Han have suffered, both in Xinjiang and throughout the country. Many Han are still suffering under state policy and uneven development. As Hansen and Stepputat (2001, 25) write:

An increasing number of studies have shown how state-centered representations have worked to incorporate communities in a hierarchically organized yet homogenous nation-state through strategies that relate certain identities to certain spaces, time sequences, substances, and so on. Who are at the center, who are at the margins? Who belong to the past of the nation, who belong to the future?

In China, the ruling power seeks to eliminate the existing population to make room for the people who do fit into the vision of national development projects and a homogenous and unified national landscape.

IV. Opinions about Policing

In this section, I explore two divergent narratives in the interview data. First, the repeating theme is, “The policing is annoying and is making business worse.” Others said, “I hardly notice the policing, but it is necessary and has made the city safer.” In these narratives, there was no clear pattern across class. I found that increased police involvement was not related to reported Han satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the police and *shequ*. Han who experienced a more active *shequ* or police presence did not always complain. For those who did complain about it, their narratives were about annoyances or how it affected their business. Their lives were not disrupted to the same degree as the Uyghurs. In contrast to the Uyghurs, the Han narratives were not about the *shequ* or police as a fearful or threatening presence. This reflects a key difference in the way that the ethnic majority and minorities experienced the police state. The Han majority, despite their grievances, generally saw the state as a patron and protector.

Uyghurs, who have always been outside of the state and on the periphery and marginalized, experienced the increased surveillance as frightening (see Chapter 4). The Uyghurs have historically been under threat because they never fit into a vision of a homogenous national landscape. They have been moved out to make space for those who do fit in. The Chinese nation-state unofficially represents the Han. For the Han as the ethnic majority, they saw the state as their advocate and their representative. The majority experienced the policing and state power differently in a tangible and material way: through systems and structures such as the police and *shequ*, minority citizens experience fear and majority citizens experience annoyance. Some Han suffered under class oppression and the inequalities of uneven development, but they experienced state power and policing in a different way.

A. Theme 3: “Business is poor and the government’s annoying regulations are not helping. People want to leave and a lot of people are leaving, which only just makes business worse.”

In these narratives, the government was described as annoying (*mafan*) rather than a real oppressive force in their lives. For example, one man in his late twenties who worked as a manager in the construction industry said, “I feel almost *too* safe, there are checks everywhere! Life feels like there is no freedom because everywhere you go there is a check on your body and your ID card.” Han people I spoke to were not always supportive of the way increased regulations were affecting business, such as rules to shut down markets at 5 pm local time (7 pm Beijing time).¹²⁵ The increased police patrols and security created annoyances for people when shopping, which they said took away customers. The difference in policing in the Han districts was noticeable when comparing 2016 to 2017.

In 2016, crowds of people descended on Xiaoximen [Small West Gate, a shopping district, market and mall] like locusts, boys carrying their girlfriend’s purse, giggling girls with all different shades of pink and red lipstick, Hui food carts selling steamed corn on the cob and Halal egg pancakes (*jianbing*). The crowds were so thick that I held my purse close to my body and gripped my friend’s hand tightly, scared of being left behind and lost. Hawkers flashed cellphones quickly at me, quickly scattering when one said, “police” (*saqchi*) just loud enough for those around him to hear. Busses rumbled past, so full of passengers that the passengers were squeezed and packed in like sardines. The people inside swayed against each other as the bus braked and started. A crowd surrounded a table piled high with winter coats, where a Han woman was standing on the table yelling out, “Only 100 kuai! Only 100 kuai!” Girls had their nails done and received double-eyelid correction treatments, and men perused the suit store. One wouldn’t even have any idea that they were in a territorially contested land; it feels like any city in China. If I asked Han people

¹²⁵ Han people use Beijing time

about it, all they said was that Uyghurs are dangerous and poor, but “I don’t really go into that part of the city much.”

In 2017, a year later, it was hard to not pay attention to what was happening, even in the Han part of the city. Police stations started to pop up on every corner like an infestation of very, very large cockroaches. Police patrolled the streets and asked to check phones. Han girls rolled their eyes and sighed when they were stopped. Every shop was required to pay for a police alert system and walkie-talkies. Employees of every shop were required to participate in “activities” (*huodong*) at the local *shequ*, including lining up with clubs whenever they hear the whistle on their street, which is several times a day during business hours. Military patrols on the streets became a common sight, where tanks, jeeps, and dark green khaki colored hummer vehicles block traffic and their sirens wail frequently, carrying propaganda signs reading messages such as, “Don’t be afraid to shed blood and sacrifice a life in the War on Terrorism.”¹²⁶ Xiaoximen closes at 5 pm everyday—everyone is forced to shut down their shop and leave for the day then and the streets sit empty, even in the summer when the sun doesn’t set until 9 pm. I was sitting sharing a drink with a Han woman named XH—and she was complaining about the frequent house checks by the *shequ*, and how she avoids them—when the military police opened our curtained room with the tip of the gun and looked inside for a moment, not saying anything before they moved on.

In 2017, 20 out of 45 Han complained about how the new security measures are affecting their businesses and talked about how people want to leave or are leaving Xinjiang. One “safety” measure was that all shop owners and employees had to wear red armbands with yellow characters reading either “Safety Personnel” or “Safety Patrol.” I noticed that Pang Ge started wearing the red “Safety Patrol” (*anquanyuan*) armband, something that I had seen for months in the Uyghur

¹²⁶ Ch: 不怕流血牺牲反恐战争

neighborhoods but was a new occurrence in the Han neighborhoods. I asked him about it and he said, “We have to wear it 24-hours a day. Just at the moment where you’re not paying attention, the *shequ* will come and check to make sure you are wearing it, so we have to wear it all the time. It’s not as bad as the Uyghur neighborhood where they have to wear whistles and carry sticks and clubs around while doing checks around the neighborhood [laughing].” At one point, two *shequ* employees accompanied by two police officers and two men with guns and wearing camouflage and riot gear came into the room to check for the regulations: the armbands, the clubs, and the police alert system. Pang Ge was overly friendly with them, but then rolled his eyes and snarled at them after they left.

When talking about the new regulations, such as the shutting down of markets at 5 pm and the safety armbands, Han people often complained about the state of business and discussed leaving Xinjiang. For example, one young Han man who grew up in Xinjiang and now works as a salesperson in a mall said, “I used to love going to the night markets. Now I kind of hate it here, I hate the changes that have occurred, especially since 7/5 when they shut down the night markets. Recently the government is managing things too strictly (*guan tai yange le*), so I want to leave and go somewhere else to develop myself.” In 2017, another massage therapist told me, “I’m going back to Gansu soon. After I get this paycheck, I’m leaving. I don’t get paid enough to eat (*chi bu bao*), so I need to find something else to do, I’m going to go back home and do something on my own, some business or something, I can’t make money here (*zai zheli bu zhuan qian*).” One female tattoo artist who had lived in Ürümchi for six years said, “Xinjiang used to be awesome. Lots of business and development and growth. These past few years it’s gotten horrible, too many incidents happening and too strict checks. Although Ürümchi is really safe now.” A forty-year old

male who owned a small gym and grew up in Xinjiang and moved to Ürümchi in 1994, explained it like this when we spoke in 2017:

The government has prioritized preserving stability (*weiwen*) over economic development and it's had a really bad effect on businesses. I know there might be some terrorists, but the probability is too small, smaller than it is worth to manage it (*guan*) this closely. It just makes one anxious and uncomfortable all time. I don't like it at all. It's too much for the actual level of threat that we face. If it wasn't for the politics—they trying to control everything, checking everything, and having too much government control and state-owned companies here—I would like it here. But because of the government I would rather live somewhere else. Everyone is leaving Xinjiang (*Xinjiang liu bu zhu ren, tamen dou paole*). But I can't move back to my *laojia*, Shanghai, because the housing is too expensive. I have my family and my daughter, and they're all here, and my daughter might not be able to go to school somewhere else because of the hukou situation, so I have to stay here at least until my daughter graduates from high school. I know a lot of people that have moved away though. The opportunities here are generally less than in *neidi*. It's because you have to have relationships (*guanxi*) here to find any kind of work.

This participant contradicted one of the main repeating themes in the data earlier in this chapter that stated there are more opportunities in Xinjiang than in *neidi*. He said the opportunities were fewer in Xinjiang. His argument was that the measures placed on businesses had restricted businesses by making people feel anxious and uncomfortable with the constant surveillance, but also has negatively affected businesses by making them shut down early or requiring certain regulations. Clearly, there were some uneven outcomes there that depend on your occupation. This man was a small business owner, so his business was affected in the ways that construction workers, miners, and restaurant staff were not. Some people were dissatisfied with the safety and government regulations, especially when it came to small business, and many Han people were reportedly leaving Xinjiang as a result. Another small business owner of a bar, a female in her late thirties who grew up in rural Hunan, explained:

The checks here are way too strict; way, way, way too strict. And it's not strict in a good way, it's the kind of strict that just makes you mad and annoyed and get a headache. It has a negative effect on our business here. A lot of Han people have run away (*pao huiqule*) and are leaving Xinjiang. Not only that, but they come and knock on your door while you're sleeping and check this and that, and interview (*panwen*) you for half a day. In this neighborhood [in the south near Uyghur-majority neighborhoods], they come knocking on people's doors in the middle of the

night in hotels checking IDs. It's crazy. They are controlling too strictly (*tamen guan de tai yan le*). Who is willing to live like that? Nobody.

The complexity of the issue along ethnic and class lines ran deep. The top-down policies were felt on the ground and how the Han reacted with anger in some cases. The state is fragmented, and citizens encounter the state as irrational.

B. Theme 4: "In general, I don't come in contact with the shequ, but when I do, I am satisfied with their work and I feel safer now."

While the Han in the above section spoke to annoyances and the Han in the section below explained to their support of the safety measures, the narratives stood in stark contrast to the Uyghur experiences (see Chapter 4 and 5). Han participants from multiple class backgrounds were satisfied with the *shequ*. For example, a female foot massage therapist from Sichuan explained to me: "I'm used to the police, it's nothing (*mei shenme shi*). It's normal to have more police in an area so close to the border with other countries." She described her experiences at the *shequ* and supported the state's justification for the measures:

We [her and the other rural migrants she worked with] have to register at the *shequ* every six months. It's really easy, you just have to go there with your ID and it's over in a few minutes. It's just for our safety. If you register then the *shequ* can keep track of you. I'm used to it though, it doesn't bother me.

Fifteen of the other rural Han migrants repeated a similar experience, such as one woman who worked at a nail and hair salon, who said: "Here the requirements are really strict and very troublesome (*mafan*), but it's not too bad, we just have to go to the *shequ* every six months, but now I feel safe, really safe." One man in his thirties who worked as a Chinese-Russian translator spoke to the experiences of local Han who did not have contact with the *shequ* at all: "I don't need to get a temporary residence permit at the *shequ* because I own the house and my wife has an Ürümchi hukou. It's only outsiders (*waidiren*) that have to register at the *shequ*." The *shequ* was

responsible for keeping track of the floating population. The migrants were considered more risk-prone to the state.

Some Han people had very positive experiences with the implemented safety measures.

For example, one female master's degree student in her early twenties said:

One thing that's changed about Ürümchi in the six years since I moved here is that the safety measures have gotten a lot more strict. That's because after 7/5 they had to start caring about safety. You may find that in Xinjiang, it doesn't matter what nationality (*minzu*) you are, people here of all ethnicities really value the aspects of safety. Have you felt that way? Everyone here has the experience of 7/5 and nobody wants that to happen again. So we all feel like safety is the most important thing.

In the context of the violence of July 2009, safety measures were seen as reasonable and necessary.

She even claimed that everyone of all ethnic backgrounds supports the measures. One research participant, an internet service manager for a telecom company said:

I've never felt unsafe in this city, but I feel even safer now that there are patrols (*xunluo*) and there are more police and security presence, more military soldiers, and the little police stations that have been set up. They have been set up so that if there is a problem, they can be at the scene in less than 1 minute. So I think that's really important and a really good improvement on the safety situation in the city. Of course if I go to a dangerous part of the city, I'm going to be more careful, but in general with the new patrols going on, and the increased police and security checks, I feel a lot safer now.

I have been very satisfied with the *shequ* recently. Before, if you had a concern or a complaint with your local government, you could file or voice your problem, but there would be no reaction nor follow-up with the government whatsoever. Now with the new *shequ*, they will address your concerns immediately and look for a solution to the problem. So I think a lot of the safety and other concerns with government bureaucracy has been addressed with the new *shequ* that hold more power and responsibility for the people.

While some Han found the *shequ* annoying and some found it beneficial, none talked about it in a fearful way. Meanwhile, the Uyghurs reported feeling fear of arrest and eviction from their only sources of livelihood in the city. On the other hand, the Han were both annoyed and genuinely concerned about their businesses, and others supportive of the police.

While some Han supported the measures and some did not, one common denominator was that the people who repeated Theme 4 about higher levels of *shequ* satisfaction were not in the Uyghur parts of the city. These are the results of state-building and nationalism when it comes to low-level, authoritarian neighborhood governance. These divergent narratives also speak to the diverse outcomes of neighborhood police governance as a function of unevenness: some were concerned about their businesses and others were not. The inequalities between Han and Uyghur lived experiences in the city show the way development discourses and policing affect people's way of life.

V. Conclusion

Majority and minority citizens experience state-building, territorial control, and nationalism differently. The Han population in Xinjiang functions as a key aspect of territory in securing Xinjiang as part of China. The divides between rural and urban populations manifest uneven development. For the rural migrant workers, their narratives concern putting food on the table and giving their children a better life than the one they had. This is a story of authoritarian dispossession of land and livelihood, of the Han who chose to leave their families. The experience of Han in the middle of the tension between rich and poor, urban and rural also require a consideration in the atmosphere of repression and marginalization.

CONCLUSION

“Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (Said 1988, 77).

This dissertation examines territory at the scale of everyday life through an ethnography. Specifically, I address questions such as the following: How does territorial dispossession work

with capital accumulation and urban development to exploit minority peoples? How do territorial representations and practices of the state illustrate divergent spaces in the body, household, and neighborhood? How does the struggle for power over minority bodies in nationalist space relate to the negotiation for state control and cultural identity?

Mitchell (1999) writes about the state effect as both material and ideological. I investigate the state in its implicit and explicit state-building efforts to control material and ideological space through state surveillance over minorities, and how that has resulted in the alienation and dispossession of the Uyghurs. In studying alienation and dispossession, I zoom in to focus on three main aspects of life in Urumqi: bureaucracy, rural-to-urban migration (Uyghur and Han), and cultural practices. While much attention is paid to visible state power, these three processes shed light on invisible modes of state power and state territorial control. I look at the *effects* of state power, especially how the multiplicity and complexity of state power is experienced when it comes to people's daily tasks. The results show experiences of confusion, fear, and mistrust when it comes to interacting with the state. One of the material effects is also the eviction and incarceration of Uyghurs in the city. I highlight a state that is ruled under fragmented authoritarianism. Consistent with Gupta (2012), I found a state that is cultural and discursive, chaotic and irrational, violent and inclusive. Similar to Hull (2012), I learned that the materiality of paperwork forms a site and network of power relations between the state and society, which highlights the banality of state power through bureaucracy and administration (Mbembe 1992).

Borrowing Mitchell's concept of the material and ideological "state effect," I provide an ethnographic view into experiences of the Chinese state in Ürümchi to exemplify how the chaos and messiness of the state apparatus is experienced in everyday life. While there are particularities to Mitchell's own fieldwork and discursive analysis in Egypt and elsewhere, his theory provides

connections to my fieldwork because of the broader patterns of Chinese state reach into everyday life through material and visible aspects, such as bureaucratic surveillance, policing, and propaganda (Chapter 4). At the same time, some Uyghur people tried to separate themselves from state presence through escapism, sometimes through ethno-cultural and religious practice (Chapter 5). Mitchell's concept of the "state effect" and Mbembe's concept of the "banality of state power" helps explain the uneven state presence I witnessed in Ürümchi. I found the spatial aspects of the *shequ* infrastructure as located in apartment buildings or within walking distance of each home in its jurisdiction was an important aspect of establishing the material and ideological "state as your neighbor" presence (Tomba 2014). Furthermore, the practices of unregistered people hiding in the home also established a spatial aspect of finding loopholes in the *shequ* rules that all migrants had to register to get permission to live there. In my work in Ürümchi, I look at 1) the intersection of representations of the state across police, bureaucracy, surveillance, and propaganda, 2) the actual implementations and encounters on the ground, and 3) how the state is seen by the people. Overall, the goal is to provide an ethnographic window at a particular space and time to understand how people experience the state effect.

I also examine Uyghur agency within the state security system as expressed through cultural practices and social membership within Uyghur society. These forms of survivance and refusal are not organized nor political action. Their modes of survivance are manifested in expressions of food culture, religious practice, creation of cultural landscapes, and struggle over contested social memberships, such as through control of marriage and childbirth. The state maintains territorial control, while people circumvent the control in different ways depending on their socioeconomic positionality. The ethnic majority Han also provide a different perspective on the city as a land of hope and opportunity that is far from home.

Using the feminist critical geopolitics literature on the links between the geopolitical and individual helps to deconstruct territory as fragmented, divisible, and contingent. This dissertation provides a window into the illustration of the connection between geopolitics and the intimate. I employ the theoretical framework of feminist geopolitics in terms of how power and territory manifests on the body and is resisted by the body in order to understand geopolitics at the bodily scale in everyday life (e.g., Hyndman 2007; Fassin 2011; Smith 2011, 2012; Fluri 2012; Mountz 2017). In following Smith (2012), I demonstrate that the body is a manifestation of territory through micro-rebellions in terms of dress, fasting, and praying. Feminist geopolitics foregrounds the narratives of the people and lives affected by geopolitical narratives, and asks how these discourses affect people and their lives. When the body becomes evidence for ethnic loyalty or disloyalty, when the politicization of religion based on geopolitical struggles over territory affects intimate decisions on individual choices, “the body itself becomes a geopolitical site” (Smith 2011, 456-57). In other words, this dissertation connects the larger geopolitical discourses around territory to intimate decisions and everyday lives of a small number of Uyghur residents in Ürümchi.

Uyghur and Han people that I observed create and produce social space at multiple scales within heavily controlled and securitized state space. Breaking down scalar hierarchies helps us better understand space and place. There is a gap between the Chinese and Turkic worlds that collides in peripheral Chinese territory. Not coincidentally, another gap exists between state control and people’s everyday lives. Uyghur cultural performances at scales of the body and household reflect affiliation with the Muslim world that disrupt the national Chinese imaginary and the false assumption of territorial control as an all-encompassing static container. At the same time, state control permeates people’s lives in disruptive ways. I find a constant back and forth

negotiation between making the rules, following the rules, and breaking the rules. This helps to better understand the everyday violence of the cultural politics of the nation-state.

State territorialization functions similar to a net of control cast over a space. It is both the control of the net—including the way the state attempts to control individual bodies and lives—and the involuntary and voluntary creation of those holes as well as how people negotiate and live inside those holes in the net of state territory that I explore here. This dissertation is the story of the net of state territorial control, as well as the holes—the spaces that the state intentionally does not fill, cannot fill, and the holes that people have ripped. If state control over a certain territory is a net, I understand any tensions between state control and individual agency as a constant negotiation between appropriation and domination of space, a push and pull between appropriation and domination that allows the Chinese government to remain in power and in control of the region. The state earns its legitimacy in the eyes of the Han by maintaining their safety, which, for the state, is defined as arresting Uyghurs and keeping Uyghurs from coming to the city, but also caring (or “developing”) for them or developing them in different ways, such as through education or building construction.

While the state’s surveillance capabilities incite stress and fear, the police still cannot obtain control over every aspect of life. Uyghurs at least somewhat successfully maintain distance between themselves and the state, creating bubbles of temporary relief from fear of state surveillance. The home sometimes serve as a temporary and autonomous refuge, while the culture of fear becomes normal. These are examples of refusal, lived citizenship, and survivance (Vizenor 2008); Simpson 2014). Settler colonialism is a useful framework to understand the politics of the dispossession of Uyghurs from the land and livelihoods in Xinjiang.

I. Contributions

I provide grounded fieldwork empirics to show how state building, nationalism, and the violence of the police state are manifested in China and the effects that this has on everyday life for minorities there. I highlight multiscale power relations and networks understood *beyond and within* nation-states. I contribute to a more nuanced understanding of territory by illustrating the modes of both control and resistance in the borderland minority regions of northwest China. Cultural performances at multiple scales from the global to the household reproduce and contest Chinese political-economic control. State territorial control is a fractured social relationship. Everyday practices show that control is incomplete. Territory is a node in complex networks, better thought of as a house with electricity and plumbing lines coming in and out of it, rather than simply a stage where politics are played out. Territory is both influenced by and influences the social, political, and economic relations that create it. Fear of incarceration caused avoidance through fragile and temporary bubbles of escape.

Understanding the repressive authoritarianism in China's peripheral minority borderlands illuminates trajectories of public policy and governance at the core. While geopolitical analyses from macro-economic and security perspectives can be useful, failure to adequately provide grounded understandings from the field will lead to misunderstandings of how governance affects everyday life trajectories.

First, I argue that the bureaucracy of government-run neighborhood community centers (*shequ*) serve as a key tool in state territorialization practices that shape daily life and social relations. Despite a rhetoric of safety and service, the fear and confusion created by the bureaucracy limited freedoms.

Second, I investigate unequal access to strategies of survival (e.g., English-language education) in the midst of heavy state security to shed new light on the neglected issue of intra-Uyghur class conflict.

Third, I examine the political economy of state terror and policing. The interviews and observations indicate that poor, rural migrants who were renting their homes were subject to more harassment by police than homeowners.

Fourth, I analyze the ethnic majority group, Han Chinese, attitudes and experiences of inequality as migrants and locals in the city of Ürümchi. I find that the Han construction of Xinjiang as a frontier zone contributes to narratives of linear progress and policing as safety.

In these main chapters, I trace the effects of neighborhood governance and uneven development on everyday life in urban Xinjiang. I examine how individuals create social space in heavily regulated and securitized state space. My work broadly explores how territorial representations and practices of the Chinese state and Uyghur society illustrate overlapping power relations at multiple scales.

II. Study Limitations

This study is only of one small community and limited generalization is warranted. The study occurred in a particular place at a particular time: in an urban setting in Ürümchi and in the province of Xinjiang from the years 2014-2017. My research was limited by the government policies that were in place at the time, and that, as illustrated within the study, were subject to change dramatically and quickly with no notice. It was conducted by a foreigner, which undoubtedly affected the way people interacted with me, and the things they chose to say and not to say to me. It was conducted by a woman, which influenced the way men in a traditional society interacted with me, and allowed me a more in-depth look at the female experience and less in-

depth look at male experience. It was conducted with a limited number of study participants that have a potential bias as people who generally had a higher interest in friendship with a foreigner, often with an interest in learning English or going/studying abroad. Some—though certainly not all—of the study participants were related either by family, marriage, or through friends, and thus my conclusions might disproportionately reflect the feelings of the same groups of people.

III. Future Research

It is still unclear as to whether or not I will be able to return to China or Xinjiang to continue to conduct research. China's "New Silk Road," or Belt-Road Initiative (BRI), is expected to put China as the centerpiece in Europe with the world's largest program of coordinated infrastructure development. Many unanswered questions remain: Will China's illiberal governance and economic development model spread to post-Soviet Central Asia? How and why does China cooperate with Russia and post-Soviet Central Asian states through infrastructure and foreign aid? Does Chinese development aid undermine local sovereignty? What does the BRI project mean for the citizens of those countries and the migrant workers who construct the projects? Will Chinese policies be met with popular support or anti-Chinese sentiment? Ultimately, I will conduct field research in Central Asia to investigate how local communities view and respond to BRI projects.

Although a significant corpus of literature on China exists, we still have unanswered questions about the sustainability of China's development model. The BRI carries implications for territorial sovereignty and how foreign investment re-positions China across the Eurasian continent, especially in regards to access to and control of energy resources.

A better understanding of the changing geographies of urban infrastructure through Chinese development aid in Central Asia during the BRI project will help us better understand the links in the spread of globalization and illiberalism.

EPILOGUE

“War is Peace. Freedom is Slavery. Ignorance is Strength.” -Orwell, *1984*

I wrote this dissertation to respect those who gave their time and hearts to me for my research, to honor their stories that line these pages. My deepest hope is that that they did not speak to me in vain. As I wrote this dissertation, I processed the grief that tangled by heart and choked my soul in the months that followed my departure from Xinjiang. I grieved the loss of the relationships with the people I left behind, knowing that I may never be able to speak to them again. This dissertation allowed me to connect with Xinjiang every day even while being apart from it. I also hope that this work will connect with others who study similar subjects.

I wrote this dissertation because I want to understand the world better and help others understand the world better. I believe there is injustice happening and I want to know why. Because I know there is inequality and I want to know why and how to make it better. I believe we can have a better future and there is a better alternative to what we have now. But we cannot just sit in our own little bubble and pretend like no injustices are happening as a result of our capitalist consumerism and imperialism. There is a human rights crisis happening on our watch.

The nation-state system sometimes inflicts violence on the most vulnerable, especially the poor, minorities and immigrants. The Uyghurs don't fit into the Chinese vision of a homogenous national landscape. What happens when a group of people don't fit in to the vision of the people in power? The people in power privilege and make room for people who do fit into their program and incarcerate those who do not. Nevertheless, I believe a more equitable, just, and inclusive world is possible if we connect with so-called "dangerous people and places" rather than avoid them, listen to them rather than perpetuate silence, and tell their stories rather than hide them.

I hope that by reading this dissertation, you, the reader, have had a taste of what life is like to live in Xinjiang. From the ways that Uyghurs carve out spaces of everyday life within the constraints of securitized state space, to the way the Han and Uyghur worlds are intertwined and

yet so separated. There was both a mix and divide of ethnicities: For example, Uyghur humor makes comedy based on Chinese puns and mixing Chinese with Uyghur.¹²⁷ I hope you have gotten a glimpse into how ethnicity plays a major role in Uyghur people's lives and their everyday practices, from major life decisions like marriage and children to minor decision like what to cook for dinner. Being Uyghur in Xinjiang means not being able to understand your Han boss and asking your ten-year old niece to interpret during a phone call with him. Being Uyghur in Xinjiang means being surrounded by restaurants you can't go to, and being surrounded by incoming competition from Han migrants who have the means and connections to sell goods cheaper than you can every afford.

I want people to be able to see and feel the liveliness I felt when I walked down the street at night in the summer. On the sidewalks, kids played and laughed. *Kawap* roasted and men played cards to Uyghur music blasting from speakers. Women sat outside their shops, fanning themselves from the summer heat cooling in the evening breeze.

I want people to know the energy I felt when dancing Uyghur traditional *ussul* at weddings; to feel the energy when I went to the bazaar; How businesses sprouted up and died overnight in a never-ending rotation of hope and disappointment. To understand the kind of poverty people experience here, as families of 6 live in a tiny one-room dorm with a shared bathroom, yet generously treated guests like royalty. I never felt worthy of such treatment.

I hope I have communicated a taste of the oppression that people feel, as Uyghurs in a colony, as women in a patriarchy, and as humans in a developing city that was moving faster than the blink of an eye for no other purpose but capital accumulation. I wish to communicate the urgency and desperation in which people want to go to America. I hope that I have illustrated an

¹²⁷ Comedian Abduherim Akman

understanding of how moving to the city is like moving to another country, and the divides between the rural and the urban are incredibly vast like two different worlds, a manifestation of uneven development. I want people to understand how the police are so incredibly useless and so incredibly scary and oppressive at the same time.

China has been my home for almost 5 years of my life. During that time, I have learned a lot about myself...and a bit about the world.

In 2009, I learned what it is like to be a minority and an alien. I was physically strange, socially ostracized, and culturally abnormal. I was also a foreign citizen with no rights as such, and following the laws of the country I was in, had no freedom of speech or assembly that we as Americans so often take for granted. I was an outsider. I learned what it's like to dream of one's home country. I learned what it was like to live in a place whose language you struggle to understand.

During those years in China, I experienced loneliness that I had never thought was possible. An unshakable loneliness that forces you to hug yourself at night while tears squeeze through your shut eyes. A loneliness that you can only know in a place where you are always and forever the outsider culturally, racially, and linguistically. Every day and everywhere you go, you are the other, the weird one, the alien.

I learned what homesickness was, a sickness that speared my heart and tangled my stomach and blocked my lungs. A homesickness that stayed with me until I finally started to learn how to breathe again and I started to crawl and then walk, and finally I was okay again. Before I knew it, I realized that I was starting to become fluent in a second language, and then third language. I learned what it's like to go back and forth between languages in my thoughts and my dreams.

After learning about Chinese language and culture for two years, I started a new adventure in 2014. I learned a third language. I witnessed the politicization of ethnicity. I learned the comfort of a headscarf. I learned how to go days without showering. I hand washed my clothes. I learned that eating Halal is about so much more than abstaining from pork. I experienced in a fearful and visceral way what it meant to have a violation of unwarranted search and seizure violated. I learned what it felt like to live in fear of state surveillance. I learned what state inflicted terror was like. I learned the violence of minority oppression in new ways, and witnessed people continuing on despite it.

In China, I struggled. But I also learned what it meant to live with all of your being, a richness and fullness of being that required every ounce of my energy, but gave back a life more colorful than I could have imagined: to love and be loved in a foreign language, to laugh until tears streamed down my cheeks, to scream in excitement and fear at the cab driver's kiss with death, to dance until the sun rose, to weave in and out of traffic on a bicycle, to share the fuzzy warmth of an intoxicated closeness, to have sleepovers and weddings and parties and dinners and secrets and whispers and inside jokes shared only with the people who know your faults as well as your strengths. The people of this country have given back to me ten times what I have given them, and they have shown me the love and warmth and kindness and hospitality in the fullness of the generosity of humanity. They have shown me as well how rich life can be when you take the risk of an adventure, the risk of a first kiss in the rain, the risk of looking stupid, the risk of failing. They have shown me the richness of adventure that you can find if you take the risk of getting lost. They have shown me their hearts—their fears, their dreams, their sorrows, and their triumphs—and in doing so have shown me the humanity of vulnerability that each and every one of us share.

In Nanjing, I learned how to live through the winter without heating or running water or an indoor toilet. I learned about the violence and instability of displacement from real estate development, the pain of inequality, and the violation of freedom. I saw development that was moving faster than anyone could handle. Development, yes. But at what cost? Pollution, poverty, discrimination, and debt. Debt that drove people to suicide, debt that drove people to hopelessness and to lives and jobs that they hated. Development that led to the disintegration of culture, social, and familial ties. And yet, despite everything, people yearned more than anything else to give their children a better life and have sacrificed their entire lives for that purpose. For them, development was the answer to their lifelong dreams to provide a better life for their children.

China has taught me more about race and gender, the pain of inequality, and the violence of development more than I could have learned by staying in the American bubble and reading books. China has taught me about my Western white privilege in painfully visceral ways that I wish I could, but never will, forget.

I say without a trace of doubt in my mind that China is one of the best thing things that's ever happened to me. I left Xinjiang in October 2017 with tears on my face and a broken heart shattered in my chest, with a dream to someday give back to the world what this experience has given me.

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Appendix A. Interview Questions in English.

Demographics and opening questions

Age:

Gender:

Ethnicity:

Place of origin (specify rural or urban origins, whether you came from a city or a village. NOTE: might also need to specify difference between hometown/place of origin versus place where you grew up and spent most of your childhood):

Rural or urban *hukou*:

Level of education:

1. For people not born in Urumqi: How long have you lived in Urumqi?
2. For people not born in Urumqi: Why did you initially move to Urumqi?
3. Why are you living in Urumqi now?
4. What is your current occupation?
5. Who do you live with (list types of family members or number of friends)?
6. For people not born in Urumqi: Do you plan to eventually return to living in your hometown? If so, when?
7. What do you plan to do next year?

Cultural practices and experiences of urban life in Urumqi

- 1a. What do you think are the major differences between the city and countryside? Which do you prefer and why?
- 2a. For people not born in Urumqi: How do you think economic development has affected your hometown (where you grew up)?
- 3a. For people not born in Urumqi: What was it like to experience the move to Urumqi? What was Urumqi like for you when you first moved here? How has your life changed since you first moved to Urumqi?
- 4a. For people born in Urumqi or living in Urumqi for more than ten years: How has Urumqi changed since you were younger (say the past 10 years or so)?
- 5a. How do you think urban development has affected Urumqi?
- 6a. What do you like and dislike about living in Urumqi?
- 7a. What are you the most satisfied with in your life? What are you the least satisfied with?
- 8a. What are the most important priorities in your life?
- 9a. Have you ever experienced discrimination or prejudice?

10a. What are your dreams or ambitions for the future? What hopes do you have for your children's future?

11a. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about living in Urumqi?

Neighborhood life in Urumqi

1b. Why do you live in this neighborhood? Do you own or rent your home? How have housing prices affected your life?

2b. Do you talk to your neighbors? What kind of relationship do you have with them?

3b. How would you describe your neighborhood? Anything unique or special, or any likes and dislikes about the neighborhood?

4b. Have you ever felt unsafe in this city?

5b. What effect migrant workers do have on the neighborhood?

6b. How often do you interact with the neighborhood community center (*shequ*)?

7b. What kinds of tasks do you go to the *shequ* for? What kind of services does the *shequ* provide for you?

8b. Are you satisfied with your experiences with the *shequ*?

9b. Do you ever shop in the blue houses (*lanfangzi*)? What has your experience shopping there been?

10b. Is there anything else you'd like to tell me about about neighborhood life here?

Appendix B. Images from *shequ* registration and propaganda documents

1.



Translation for #1: (Paper posted in Uyghur inside the *shequ* police station, in Uyghur only)

Nanwan Street Resident Committee Renters' Necessary Materials

1. ID (multiple copies)
2. First page of your hukou booklet (multiple copies)
3. Proof of employment
4. A guarantor must come in person
5. First page of your children's hukou booklet, children's vaccination booklet (they must have received all of their injections)
6. The landlord must come in person
7. Marriage license
8. If you plan to register your children for school, the school must write, sign and stamp a letter saying "it's okay for this student to live in a rented house outside."

Explanation: If you bring all of the above materials, we will give you a registration for your rented house.

Below that, in Chinese:

To every resident in this jurisdiction:

Inquire about a social security card, business consulting, convenient service for the People, Please add the Nanwan North Street Community Center WeChat Public Group Number! [QR code]

2.



Translation for #2 (from top to bottom):

“According to the law, severely punish the violent terrorist crimes!

For the especially violent terrorists, we only have one type of attitude, which is to attack with a heavy fist!

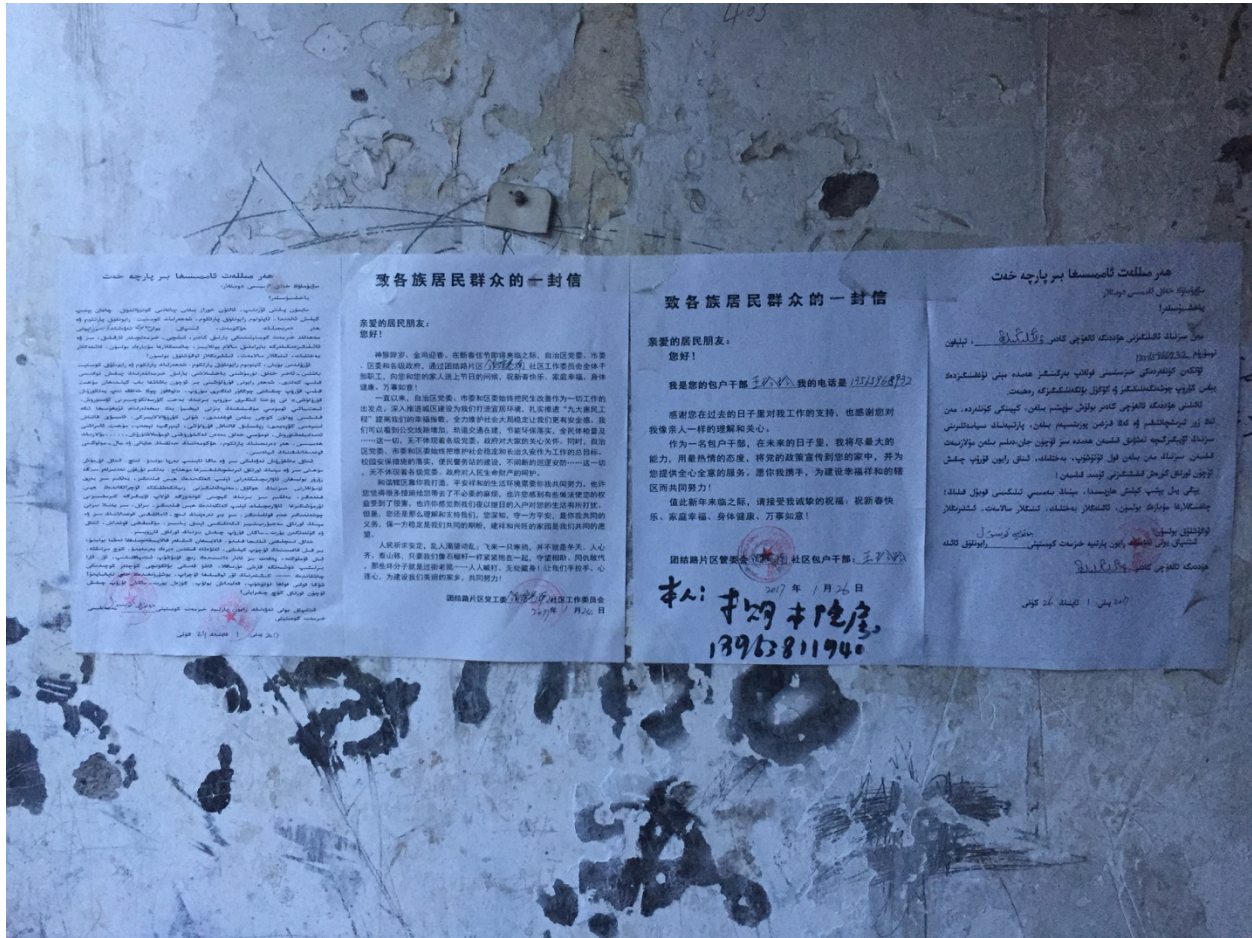
Attack with a heavy fist, severely crackdown on violent terrorists!

According to the law, seriously attack violent terrorist crimes, capture those in the People's anti-terrorist and social stabilization war on terror for a magnificent victory!

Ürümchi City Tianshan District Social Management Comprehensive Administration Committee Office"

In these examples, the Uyghur script is on top in the same size font as the Chinese because they are directed towards a Uyghur audience.

3.



Translation for #3: (Two letters posted on the wall of an underpass in my neighborhood, posted on many walls and buildings in both Chinese and Uyghur in winter of 2016-2017):

First letter on the left (致各族居民群众的一封信):

A letter sent to the resident masses of every ethnicity

Dear Resident Friend, Hello! (respectful)

Welcome the Spring and Year of the Golden Rooster! In the coming of the new spring holiday, the autonomous region CCP committee, city committee, district committee, and at every level of government, through the Tuanjie Lu Area [name of street written in here] shequ worker's committee entire worker's cadre, would like to say hello, wish you a happy New Year, a fortunate family, healthy body, and best wishes to you and your family!

For a long time now, the autonomous region CCP committee, city committee, and district committee from beginning to end put the people's lives improvement to act as every job's starting point. Deeply improving the city district's construction for the creation of people's livable environment, as well as protecting society's great stability has let me dream of having a greater feeling of safety.

We can see the public transportation lines improving, new subway lines being constructed, measures to protect the environment, health physicals for all the people... All of these things without exception embody on CCP committee on every level and the government be concerned about and show care for (关心关怀) everyone. At the same time, the autonomous region's CCP committee, city committee and district committee, from the beginning to the end, puts protecting social stability and long-time governance, long term peace to act as the constant goal/purpose of the work. School campus safety implementation, construction of convenient police reporting stations, not to mention the new Safety Patrols (巡逻安防) ... All of these things without exception embody that on CCP committee on every level and the government cherish/conserves the people's lives and assets.

A harmonious district depends on you and me to create it, safe and sound, peaceful and auspicious alike too and the living environment need you and me to work hard together. Maybe you feel that so much construction has brought you a lot of unnecessary trouble (麻烦), maybe you feel there are some practices that have harmed/neglected (侵害) your rights, maybe you feel that the days we enter your home in the middle of the night has interrupted your life a bit. But, you still are so understanding and supportive of us, you know deeply, that for the defense of our peace and safety, it's you and me together our obligation, defending one side of stability (保一方稳定) is our hope and expectation, health, peace and auspicious, and prosperous home is our shared wish.

The people pray for calm and orderly, chaotic (乱) people thirst for turmoil; when a Eurasian jackdaw (寒鸦) flies, it doesn't necessarily mean it's winter. The will of the people (人心) will even out/is identical (齐) and Mt. Tai will move, as long as we tightly hug together like the seeds of the pomegranate, join forces to defend against external aggressors (守望相助) and have anger against a common enemy (同仇敌忾), those few evil people will be detested by all like a rat crossing the street (过街老鼠) ---everybody shout to strike, there will be nowhere to hide! Let's hold hands and join hearts in order to construct our beautiful native homeland, and work hard together!

Tuanjie Lu Area CCP Workers' Committee [name of shequ] shequ worker's committee

January 24, 2017

Second letter (side by side first letter, also with Uyghur translation)

致各族居民群众的一封信

A letter sent to the resident masses of every ethnicity

Dear Resident Friend, Hello! (respectful)

I am your Protect the Household Officer [insert name-female Han here]. My phone number is [cell phone number listed here].

Thank you for supporting my job over the past several days, and thank you for understanding and caring for me like a family member.

In being a Protect the Household Officer, in the coming days, I will to the best of my ability and to the greatest extent, use the most enthusiastic and cordial attitude, in order to disseminate the Party's Policies into the middle of your home/family, and with my whole heart and being be at your service. I hope you and I will hold hands in order to construct a prosperous and auspicious administrative region and together strive hard!

During the approaching new year, please accept our honest blessings: wishing you a Happy New Year, a fortunate family, a healthy body, and all your wishes come true!

Tuanjie Lu Area Management Committee [name of street/neighborhood] Shequ Protect the Household Officer: Female Han name

4.



Translation for #4 (Public conversation about renting homes on WeChat):

(A is Han and B is Uyghur):

A: Is your *hukou* also from Hoten? Big Xinjiang right now is getting more and more laughable.

B: What's up?

A: My friend is a minority and their *hukou* is from Hotan. They're working here [in Ürümchi], but were rushed back to Hotan.

B: I had moved my *hukou* here, but my original census registration is from Hotan, so right now renting a house is extremely difficult. At least the place where I work doesn't care about *hukou*.

A: Then it's fine; this city doesn't restrict *hukou*.

B: Renting homes is restricted. I've been looking for a house for half a month now, as soon as they hear I'm a minority, they immediately just won't rent it to me.

A: Oh boy, that's the way it is. With the *shequ* arrangement, if they rent to a minority, there's a penalty fine.