Spirit Breaking: Uyghur Dispossession, Culture Work and Terror Capitalism in a Chinese Global City


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Spirit Breaking examines the way migration and urban cleansing are embedded in a complex set of economic changes and modes of representation in contemporary China. The project is framed by a discussion of linkages between Uyghur dispossession, an emergent terror capitalism and new forms of culture work in a Chinese global city called Ürümchi. It demonstrates how Uyghurs have become the object of terror capitalism and the role of cultural production in both building and refusing this new economic formation and gendered, ethno-racial violence. It argues that terror capitalism becomes a source of energy that turns the self into a source of refusal, however fragile, as friends and loved-ones are placed in indefinite detention. In general though the fracturing of both Han and Uyghur sociality produces life stories that are caught in the magnetism of mass incarceration, the culture work of multicultural domination and the “reeducation” internment camp system that attempts to eliminate Uyghur religious practice, one of the last remaining spaces of Uyghur social autonomy. Through this the violence of state-directed capitalist dispossession is shown to break the spirit and vitality of Uyghur sociality while linking Han life paths to this new form of domination and exploitation.

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- East Asian
- Ethnography
- Gender
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