State Racism and Surveillance in Xinjiang (People's Republic of China)

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Abstract

Racism, as a truly global phenomenon, requires a comparative approach that can account for its diverse forms and their commonalities. Despite the prevalence and relevance of racism throughout Asia, much scholarship on the topic remains parochially focussed on the north Atlantic world. This article aims to help address this issue in two ways. First, it discusses surveillance and racialisation practices in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, based on an examination of leaked police files from the city of Urumqi. It examines how racialisation processes are carried out through surveillance, who these impact, and how. Second, these empirical materials are put in a broader comparative framework, drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of state racism, which sees racism as a technique of governance common to all contemporary states. The conclusions reflect on what it means to undertake anti-racist scholarship in a world of racist states.

Keywords: state racism, surveillance, anti-racism, Xinjiang, China

Introduction: racism and the People's Republic of China

…China's current government, while authoritarian, is not particularly racist (except perhaps at the margins).[1]

ON 13 AUGUST 2021, the official Twitter account of the Chinese embassy in Antigua and Barbuda tweeted an image showing foreign diplomats in Beijing standing together. Since deleted, but preserved as a screencap by other Twitter users, the tweet referred to one of the diplomats as a 'little yellow-skinned' 'Japanese' who was 'not even qualified to stand on the stage'. Meanwhile, the same account, twelve days earlier, had described Chinese athlete Su Bingtian as 'the first yellow race to qualify for the men's 100 meters race final'. In these two tweets we see race being used to unite and exalt (China's majority Han Chinese people as the 'yellow race', victorious in the international arena) and to divide and debase (the 'yellow-skinned Japanese', unfit to stand among the international community and, by implication, humanity).[2]

A body of scholarship has taken up these themes to examine 'race' in the People's Republic of China, chronicling the pervasiveness of racism in the country's past and present. One manifestation of this racism is anti-blackness, as seen, for example, in discrimination against African migrants, or the use of black-face in the New Year Gala, China's most-watched television programme. Researchers have also investigated how the dominant Han group has been constructed as a racial category, as well as the perpetuation of white privilege in China. Finally, there is also a growing body of research on the racial dimensions of prejudice and discrimination against minorities like Tibetans, Uyghurs and

[1] T. May. 'Non-violence and the ghost of fascism', in B. Evans and A. Parr, eds., *Conversations on Violence: An Anthology*, London, Pluto Press, 2021, pp. 31–37.

[2] The 13 August tweet was screen-capped and shared by Kenneth Roth: tweet, 13 August 2021; https://twitter.com/KenRoth/status/1426093974876471299; the 1 August tweet is still available on the official Twitter account of the Chinese Embassy in Antigua and Barbuda, 1 August 2021; https://archive.ph/7Jx51 (both accessed 18 May 2022).

other non-Han peoples, including practices of Islamophobia.[3]

That said, scholarship on racism in China has generally not been integrated into broader theorisations of racism and anti-racism. This is symptomatic of the parochial, north Atlantic focus of most scholarship on racism and anti-racism. We see this, for example, in a recent 'international' reference work on 'contemporary racisms', which begins by highlighting how theoretical and empirical conversations on race and racism are limited by a lack of engagement between scholars in the US and Europe. At the same time as highlighting this Euro-American divide as a central problem in the study of racism, this handbook does not include a single study from Africa or Asia.[4]

As researchers working on contemporary Asia, we see this as deeply problematic. Racism is an integral aspect of state governance and human experience across Asia. Historical and contemporary demonstrations of this include Japan's imperial project of racialisation and its legacies; the genocidal outcomes of Myanmar's system of 'national races'; persistent discrimination against so-called 'Mongoloids' in India; and the persistence of violent race supremacism in Mongolia, among other examples. The study of contemporary racisms and anti-racisms need to take these into account.

Conversations like the one taking place in this special issue play an important role in addressing this problem. However, we also need to acknowledge that the uptake of work on race in China is partly limited by the way that such scholarship is often carried out and communicated by researchers operating from within an area studies bubble. Much of the scholarship on China continues to adopt what Paul Cohen labelled, in 1984, a 'China-centred' approach: one that seeks to understand China and its civilization on 'its own terms'.[5] As a result, we see the prevalence of concepts like 'chauvinism', 'ethnocentrism', 'ethnic discrimination' or 'ethnocultural prejudice' when Sinologists discuss racism in China, which reinforces, often unconsciously, state discourse about the unique nature of *minzu* or 'ethnic' relations in China, and thus lends support to the Chinese state's contention that 'race' and 'racism' are Western problems and somehow irrelevant to Chinese society. This vocabulary makes it easy to overlook the contemporary parallels and historical connections between practices of racialisation in China and other parts of the world.

We aim to highlight those parallels and connections by eschewing a 'China-centred approach' and using a theoretical framework that enables comparisons between China and elsewhere. We follow the editors of this special issue in moving beyond a narrow, biological vision of racism focussed on phenotypic difference, and by looking more broadly at cultural racism and racialisation processes. We also extend on this approach by foregrounding

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[3]For general studies on race in China, see F. Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China*, London, Hurst, 1992; and Y. Cheng, *Discourse of Race and Rising China*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2019. On anti-blackness, see R. Castillo. '"Race" and "racism" in contemporary Africa-China relations research: approaches, controversies and reflections', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 3, 2020, pp. 310–336; M. Zhou, S. Shenasi and T Xu, 'Chinese attitudes toward African migrants in Guangzhou, China', *International Journal of Sociology*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2016, pp. 141–61. On the racialisation of the Han, see T. Mullaney, et al., eds., *Critical Han Studies: The History, Representation, and Identity of China's Majority*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012; J. Leibold, 'More than a category: Han supremacism on the Chinese internet', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 203, 2010, pp. 539–559; J. Leibold, 'Han cybernationalism and state territorialization in the People's Republic of China', *China Information*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2016, pp. 3–28. White privilege in China is discussed in S. Lan, 'Between privileges and precariousness: remaking whiteness in China's teaching English as a second language industry', *American Anthropologist*, 2021; https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13657 (accessed 18 May 2022). On racial dimensions of governing non-Han peoples, see G. Roche, 'Lexical necropolitics: the raciolinguistics of language oppression on the Tibetan margins of Chineseness', *Language & Communication*, vol. 76, 2021, pp. 111–120. On Islamophobia, see, for example, D. R. Stroup, 'Good *minzu* and bad *minzu*: Islamophobia in China's state media', *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2021, pp. 1231–1252; and M. Erie, 'Shari'a as taboo of modern law: Halal food, Islamophobia, and China', *The Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2018, pp. 390–420.

[4]J. Solomos, ed., *Routledge International Handbook on Contemporary Racisms*, London, Routledge, 2020.

[5]P. A. Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984.

three elements of what Michel Foucault called 'state racism': how the modern state sorts its population into 'good' and 'bad' races; how it seeks to excise—through direct and indirect violence—the unwanted, threatening racial other; and how racism is thus used as a technique of governance, rather than simply a form of interpersonal prejudice or structural discrimination. We examine these issues through an exploration of racialisation and surveillance in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, currently in western China. We draw on leaked police files from the city of Urumqi to explore how the state has created a hybrid regime of high- and low-tech surveillance methods to mark, monitor and constitute racialised others in the region, as part of a wider agenda to secure and remake the physical and human geography of Xinjiang.

Other writing on contemporary Xinjiang has employed concepts of race, but often in ways that reduce it to visible biological difference between, say, the Han majority and the Uyghur people, or acts of racial prejudice targeting Muslim minorities. Race as a biological category is frequently conflated with 'ethnicity', 'nationality' and 'nation' in the Chinese context, with commentators loosely and often inconsistently translating the Chinese term *minzu* rather than interrogating the racialising processes that sit behind state discourse and practices. This terminological snare helps to obfuscate the way race functions as a tool of party-state governance, constituting and naturalising the coercive yet hierarchical inclusion of peripheral groups—like the Uyghurs, but also uncouth Han migrants—into a bounded and imagined Chinese race-state (中华民族), while simultaneously marking some of them as 'abnormal', 'untrustworthy', and inherently 'dangerous'. We argue that Chinese state rule aims to domesticate racialised minorities through an intentionally violent process of purification.

To help highlight the parallels between these initiatives in Xinjiang and racist practices elsewhere, we begin by discussing how we see the relationship between the state, racism and death. Following this, we move on to examine state surveillance practices in the city of Urumqi, before concluding with some reflections on how our approach can inform anti-racist scholarship.

State racism and the governance of death

Rather than seeing racism as a form of prejudice or discrimination attached to bodily difference, we draw on theories which propose that racism is essentially a technique of governance that is practised, to varying degrees and in different ways, by all modern states—a claim that we explore in this section.[6] At the heart of this approach to state racism is what political theorist Saul Newman refers to as a 'war model'—the idea that society is organised around permanent, but mostly invisible, conflict, initiated and guided by the state. In this context, the analyst's task is to discover 'the war that is going on beneath peace', the 'battlefront' that 'runs through the whole society, continuously and permanently'.[7]

This situation of permanent, immanent, conflict can be traced to the origin of the modern state. Initially, this conflict appeared in opposition to the sovereign's power and race, in this context, appeared as a revolutionary, proto-nationalist historical discourse that united subaltern subjects against the sovereign, whose person and apparatus of rule were construed as foreign and illegitimate, and attacked and deposed through 'race wars'. Following their

[6]The model of state racism we present here draws largely from M. Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 [1976]. For other works that use and develop this model, see A. L. Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*, Durham, Duke University Press, 1996; A. Mbembé, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2002, pp. 11–40; M. Kelly, 'Racism, nationalism and biopolitics: Foucault's *Society Must be Defended*, 2003', *contretemps*, vol. 4, 2004, pp. 58–70; A. Moreton-Robinson, 'Towards a new research agenda? Foucault, whiteness and Indigenous sovereignty', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 42, no. 4, 2006, pp. 383–395; K. Su Rasmussen, 'Foucault's genealogy of racism', *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2011, pp. 34–51; H. Nishiyama, 'Towards a global genealogy of biopolitics: race, colonialism, and biometrics beyond Europe', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2015, pp. 331–346.
[7]S. Newman. 'Research methods and problems: postanarchism', in R. Kinna, ed., *The Bloomsbury Companion to Anarchism*, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, pp. 41–49; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 51.

emergence across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the ideas of race and race war underwent several transcriptions from the seventeenth to nineteenth century, until eventually, both were reabsorbed and redeployed by the state as a technology of governance: an expression of sovereign power wielded against the people, rather than a revolutionary force opposing the sovereign.

At this historical moment when race and race wars were being reintegrated into the fabric and strategies of the state, it adopted a novel mode of governance, becoming a 'biopolitical' state: one that governs by increasing the vitality and productivity of the population, not simply as a source of legitimacy, but also as its ultimate source of power (hence *biopower*). In the biopolitical state, the vitality and flourishing of the population must be accompanied by a productive process of creating death: killing some so that others may live. This innovation first emerged in colonial contexts, which produced new, and fundamentally racist, justifications and rationalisations for killing at the individual and group level. Redeployed into the European nation states already animated by discourses of race wars, racist violence became a new technique of governing.

Combining techniques perfected in the colonies, discourses borrowed from revolutionary movements and the emerging logics of evolutionary biology and biomedicine, the biopolitical state is founded on a 'racial *caesura*' which requires it to kill anyone who threatens the vitality and purity of the general population. This does not necessarily involve direct killing, but can include any number of methods that shorten, worsen, or diminish the life of specific, 'aberrant' racialised populations, in order to make the state's 'normal' population live better, longer and more productively.

The murderous function of state racism takes place on two temporal planes. First, there is direct, immediate killing, such as the murder of George Floyd, that sparked the 2020 Back Lives Matter protests, or the ongoing deadly violence of Indigenous deaths in custody in Australia. But these immediate expressions of state racism are also accompanied by a more diffuse, dispersed form of 'slow death'. For example, in the US context, Black Americans have higher mortality rates, get sick at younger ages and have more severe illnesses over their lifespan, all resulting from the way that systemic and interpersonal discrimination produce not only differential access to healthcare, but also stress that cumulatively wears down the body and reduces the effectiveness of the immune system. One estimate suggests that these racist inequities have resulted in 4.2 million 'unnecessary' deaths in the US since 1964. Whether a person is shot by police or dies prematurely owing to racist health inequities, both are expressions of state racism's murderous imperative.[8]

To govern, then, is to mark, monitor, and adjust the division between the 'normal' population who are made to live and flourish, and racial others who are let or made to die. This function is now 'woven into the weft of the social body, threaded through its function', such that the modern state 'can scarcely function without becoming involved with racism.'[9] The legal scholar Leo Kuper describes this murderous capacity of the state as a 'right to genocide' under which 'the sovereign territorial state claims, as an integral part of its sovereignty, the right to commit genocide, or engage in genocidal massacres, against people under its rule, and [which] the United Nations, for all practical purposes, defends'.[10] The historian Mark Levene makes a similar point when he claims that genocides are not isolated events carried out by aberrant states, but

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[8] C. Carter, 'Racist monuments are killing us', *Museum Anthropology*, vol. 41, no. 2, 2018, pp. 139–141; R. Yearby, 'Sick and tired of being sick and tired: putting an end to separate and unequal health care in the United States 50 years after the Civil Rights Act of 1964', *Health Matrix*, vol. 25, 2015, pp. 1–32; A. Geronimus, M. Hicken, D. Keene, J. Bound, '"Weathering" and age patterns of allostatic load scores among blacks and whites in the United States', *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 96, no. 5, 2006, pp. 826–833. For links between police killings of black Americans and health inequities, see S. Watson, 'Lessons from Ferguson and beyond: bias, health and justice', *Minnesota Journal of Law, Science, and Technology*, vol. 18, 2017, pp. 111–142. On the concept of slow death more generally, see L. Berlant, 'Slow death (sovereignty, obesity, lateral agency)', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, 2007, pp. 754–780.

[9] Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, p. 69; Foucault, *Society Must Be Defended*, p. 254.

[10] L. Kuper, *Genocide: Its Political Use in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven CT, Yale University Press, 1981, p. 161.

rather, emerge from 'the very process of historical development out of which our entire, global, political-economic system has emerged.'[11]

Situated within this global political-economic system, the People's Republic of China is a practitioner of state racism like any other state. Our task is to explore how it governs by differentiating populations between those that must live (and live more, and better), and those that must be let or made to die, in a necessary zero-sum relation. As previous scholarship on the Xinjiang crisis has shown, the state's agenda in the region has clear biopolitical imperatives, including the desire to 'optimise' the population structure of the region through the manipulation of birth rates and targeted resettlement of Han and Uyghur communities, the systemic surveillance and securitisation of large segments of the population, and the deployment of biomedical ('cancerous cells' and 'malignant tumours') and dehumanising ('rats' and 'flies') metaphors to racialise the Uyghurs and other 'aberrant' communities in Xinjiang. Our contribution in this regard is to show how surveillance operates to not simply police this fundamental racial divide, but also to create it.[12]

Surveillance and racialisation in Xinjiang: evidence from the Urumqi police files

During the late Qing dynasty, the Chinese state colonised Xinjiang and other parts of its imperial frontier through new technologies of state- and empire-building, including a systematic programme of Han resettlement and social control. Settler colonialism continued, following the establishment of the Chinese Republic, and intensified as state power grew in the post-Mao era, eventually attracting nearly 11 million Han settlers to Xinjiang and ongoing cycles of state violence and mass resistance. In the context of a new uptick in violence and instability, Xi Jinping announced a 'people's war' in 2014 and called on Xinjiang authorities to show 'absolutely no mercy' in eradicating the purported 'three evil forces' of extremism, terrorism and splittism that were deemed a core threat to the regime's national security.[13]

From late 2016, Xinjiang party secretary, Chen Quanguo, built a vast network of re-education camps—sprawling prison-like facilities with barbed wired fences and watch towers—and then interned Uyghurs and other Turkic speaking Muslim minorities in these facilities without legal recourse. These now well-documented camps are only one aspect of the CCP's multi-pronged and highly coercive project to remake Xinjiang society, which includes the destruction of minority culture and language, a set of eugenics policies aimed at reducing the size and concentration of the Uyghur population, and efforts to discipline and remould Uyghurs and other 'backward' communities through forced labour assignments.

The Urumqi police files, a massive 52 gigabyte cache of confidential documents hacked

[11]M. Levene, *Genocide in the Age of the Nation-State. Volume 1: The Meaning of Genocide*, London & New York, IB Tauris, 2005, p. 9.

[12]For a discussion of the emergence of the biopolitical state in China, see M. Thompson, 'Foucault, fields of governability, and the population-family-economy nexus in China', *History and Theory*, vol. 51, 2012, pp. 42–62. For biopolitical studies on Xinjiang, see Y. Li, 'A failure in "designed citizenship": a case study in a minority-Han merger school in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region', *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2016, pp. 22–43; D. Tobin, 'Struggle of life or death: Han and Uyghur insecurities on China's north-west frontier', *The China Quarterly*, vol. 242, 2020, pp. 301–323; S. Roberts, 'The biopolitics of China's "war on terror" and the exclusion of the Uyghurs', *Critical Asian Studies*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2018, pp. 232–258.

[13]See J. Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (revised and updated edition), New York, Columbia University Press, 2021; D. Tobin, *Securing China's Northwest Frontier: Identity and Insecurity in Xinjiang*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020; S. Roberts, *The War on the Uyghurs: China's Internal Campaign Against a Muslim Minority*, Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 2020; M. Clarke, ed., *The Xinjiang Emergency: Exploring the Causes and Consequences of China's Mass Detention of Uyghurs*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2022; D. Byler, *Terror Capitalism: Uyghur Dispossession and Masculinity in a Chinese City*, Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2022. For authoritative resources documenting the Chinese government's crackdown in Xinjiang see the Xinjiang Data Project; https://xjdp.aspi.org.au/; Xinjiang Documentation Project; https://xinjiang.sppga.ubc.ca; and the expert submissions compiled by the Uyghur Tribunal; https://uyghurtribunal.com/ (all accessed 18 May 2022).

from the public security bureau of Xinjiang's regional capital in 2019 and then leaked to *The Intercept*, provides a rare and intimate window into the thinking, discourse and actions of Communist Party authorities on the ground.[14] They include detailed weekly reports on surveillance, investigations and actions taken by beat-level police and community officials in local neighbourhoods in Urumqi in 2018 and early 2019. By mobilising a range of human and automated surveillance tools, grassroots party officials patrolled local communities—literally street by street, flat by flat—proactively to identity what Darren Byler calls 'pre-crimes' and 'pre-criminals', that is, those who show manifestations or 'sprouts' of extremism, and then seek pre-emptively to eliminate those dangers through intrusive monitoring and 'transformation through re-education' work.[15] The police reports are constantly warning about the 'lurking' and 'hidden' dangers within their jurisdictions, and seek to portray the image of an orderly, proactive and benevolent governance of society. Yet, behind the reports' formulaic punctiliousness, we find the often-arbitrary application of state power, with individuals marked, haphazardly and in response to performance quotas, as 'at risk' and thus requiring near daily state 'care'.

Micro acts of surveillance, like we find in present day Xinjiang, constitute race, identifying aberrant segments of the population, racialising them as a danger to the stability and prosperity of the community, and then extirpating them through re-education. Surveillance, David Lyon argues, is not only about watching but also social sorting.[16] Surveillance, like race, is a status-defining process, assigning worth or risk, that can have wide ranging implications for its recipients. The Urumqi police files are filled with categories of perceived danger and remediation. These groupings transcend static state categories, such as Uyghur or Han, and can draw a range of people into the state's purview.

In fact, a person's state-assigned *minzu* status is only one marker that informs the state's racialisation practices in Xinjiang. There are many others that emerge from the Urumqi police files: one's language (the files repeatedly mention the need to monitor 'minority language speakers'); those who are unemployed or without a fixed income; people who attend mosque or pray; individuals with overseas connections; petitioners; those engaging in prostitution, gambling and drug use; the mentally ill; heretics and cult members; those born after the 1990s or 2000s; or anyone with a prior criminal record. There are over thirty police tags in the Urumqi files, which are often colour-coded into three levels of severity: yellow, orange and red, the most untrustworthy, requiring in some cases their 'immediate arrest'.[17]

Collectively, these population categories are frequently referred to as 'targeted persons' or 'targeted groups' that comprise the vast majority of the police investigations, monitoring and actions, including the decision to send an individual off for extrajudicial re-education or formal incarceration. In these camps and prisons, detainees are subjected to dehumanised treatment: made to defecate in buckets; subjected to physical, psychological, sexual torture; and told their culture, religion and language are abnormal, backward and dangerous to the health of the nation. And even those who fall in line and adopt the language and norms of the party-state constantly live with the fear of being labelled a 'two-faced person' whose innermost being is questioned because of the way they look or act.

State officials in Xinjiang make frequent reference to the 'three-types of people' (三类人员), that is, those who participate in extremist activities 'not serious enough to constitute a crime', those whose activities 'posed a real danger but did not cause actual harm', and those who

[14] Y. Grauer, 'Revealed: massive Chinese police database', *The Intercept*, 29 January 2021. The second author would like to thank Yael Grauer for sharing the database with him and his colleagues at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, where they were used, in part, for V. Xiuzhong Xu, J. Leibold and D. Impiombato, *The Architecture of Repression: Unpacking Xinjiang's Governance*, Canberra, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2021.

[15] D. Byler, *In the Camps: China's High-tech Penal Colony*, New York, Columbia Global Reports, 2021, p. 54 and passim.

[16] D. Lyon, *Surveillance as Social Sorting*, London, Routledge, 2002.

[17] Xinjiang Victims Database, 'Victim-centered primary evidence for the mass incarcerations and immense rights violations in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region', 2 December 2021; https://shahit.biz/xjvictims_primary.pdf (accessed 18 May 2022).

served time for terrorism and still pose 'a potential threat to society'.[18] Take for example, the weekly report from the Shuimogou District police station on 18 March 2019. Under the header 'enemy situation', the file records the existence of 1,438 people from 554 households belonging to the 'three-types of people' in the neighbourhood, and then provides detailed notes on the situation of each relative and family member: those complaining and emotionally unstable; those seeking to travel to Beijing for a job interview; those wanting to visit a sick relative in hospital, and so on.

These 'targeted people' are monitored through (at times) daily household visits and ubiquitous checkpoints, claiming in their reports to be providing their charges with 'comfort' by demonstrating the party's 'care', what Jennifer Pan calls 'repressive assistance', a governance strategy that is not unique to Xinjiang.[19] In each case the local officials record the name (in Chinese characters), *minzu* identity, state ID numbers, residential address and, in some cases, phone numbers of each target of state invigilation. Once marked as a subject of concern, these individuals are essentially excommunicated, a racialised other left to die, and only redeemable through the coercive stripping away of bad, backward and dangerous habits, and mortal rebirth in the image of the party-state.

Police in Xinjiang also make use of new automated forms of biometric surveillance—facial recognition and emotion detection cameras, smart checkpoints, phone monitoring software—that tracks targeted groups as they move throughout space and then (in theory) tips off the authorities if any irregularities are found. These tools use a set of algorithms to identify markers of pre-crime that might be physical features and racial phenotypes that cameras have been programmed (in theory) to identify and then provide police with a 'real-time warning'. The Urumqi police files make frequent reference to the Integrated Joint Operations Platform, an AI-driven system that automatically flags someone if they have an unexpected visitor at home, drive a car that does not belong to them, receive an overseas phone call, or use a file sharing app. In police reports, these often-innocuous acts are criminalised, described as 'enemy movements' or 'important intelligence', and then used to sort Xinjiang's population into those who can be trusted and those who cannot, and earmark those deemed 'untrustworthy' for intensive state intervention and transformation work.

Beat-level police and community officials—who are often Uyghurs themselves—are given quotas for monitoring targeted persons in their jurisdiction and reporting actionable intelligence up the hierarchy. As Darren Byler argues, these quotas create a perverse incentive structure for hyper-policing, and trumping up or even manufacturing 'hidden dangers' from amongst everyday social actions of these communities.[20] The result is one racialised group (the trusted or 'good' Uyghur) policing another (the untrusted or 'bad' Uyghur) with the arbitrary power and authority of the state being the chief determinant of what category one falls into, and for how long.

Conclusion: anti-racist scholarship in a world of racist states

In Urumqi, and Xinjiang more generally, the state does not simply target and discriminate against a racial group that unproblematically exists before the act of surveillance. Nor is surveillance based solely on the monitoring of physical attributes. Instead, surveillance practices revealed in the Urumqi police files seek to racialise relative to the fundamental biopolitical rupture separating life and death. Although *minzu* identity plays a role in this process, it is only one aspect of a complex and shifting apparatus which shunts people back and forth across the racial frontier in response to perceived threats to collective life. The threatening quality of a person or group

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[18] State Council Information Office, 'White paper: vocational education and training in Xinjiang', *China Daily*, 17 August 2019; http://english.www. gov.cn/archive/whitepaper/201908/17/content_WS5d57573cc6d0c6695ff7ed6c.html (accessed 18 May 2022).

[19] J. Pan, *Welfare for Autocrats: How Social Assistance in China Cares for its Rulers*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020.

[20] D. Byler, 'Chinese infrastructures of population management on the new silk road', A. L. Denmark and L. Myers, eds., *Essays on the Rise of China and its Implications*, Wilson Center, Washington DC, 2021, pp. 7–34, at p. 20.

at any time emerges from not just their 'physical type', but also their mood, economic status, presumed thoughts, behaviours, sartorial choices, ideological stances, relationships, position in space, and so on.

When surveillance practices place a person on the wrong side of the racial *caesura*, their life and ability to live are curtailed. They experience increased surveillance, harassment, diminished life chances, containment and physical punishment, all in an effort to transform them into a pliable and non-threatening subject who can be relied on to produce the right sort of life for the state. In cases where this is deemed or proved impossible, the state engages in more direct forms of killing. But such direct killing remains, as far as we know, relatively rare in Xinjiang. In the region's concentration camps, the state isn't gassing Uyghurs and other minorities to death, but rather, slowly and persistently scraping away elements of their identity, memory and self.

The perspective of state racism that we draw on sees this racialised (and racialising) surveillance and internment as part of a continuum, with spectacular visible killing—the immediate physical destruction of individual bodies or entire populations—at one end, and less transparent and more indirect forms of annihilation by 'slow death' at the other. As we explained above, state racism exploits both direct killing and deadly inequities, combining to produce a 'group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death'.[21] Linking of direct and indirect forms of killing does not imply a conceptual inflation, where surveillance and incarceration are equated with killing. Rather, it suggests that killing, incarceration and surveillance are parts of a spectrum of techniques deployed by the state to distribute premature death to 'abnormal' populations as a means of disciplining and transforming them and, at the same time, ensuring the security and flourishing of the 'normal' population.

Following scholars like Foucault, Mbembé, Kuper and Levene, we have argued that this necropolitical function of state racism is embedded in the practice of *all* contemporary states. The modalities, targets and intensities of racism differ from one state to the next, but for all contemporary states, the biopolitical imperative of making the population flourish is always achieved by targeting certain populations for extirpation.

Where does this leave our efforts to build anti-racist scholarship and practice? We argue that a central task of anti-racist scholarship in a world of racist states is to track, expose, and interrupt (where possible) the circulation of techniques and technologies of deadly racialisation between states. Whereas previously, the colony provided a space in which the state experimented with new methods of murderous governance, a different geography of violent circulations now exists, exploiting the peripheries, enclaves and ruptures of a world system made of racist states.

Practices of state racism in Xinjiang demonstrate this. The current crisis in Xinjiang emerged from and is tied to practices of state racism elsewhere. It adopts the logic and legitimising mechanisms of the Global War on Terror, developed by the US and its allies in countless sites around the world over the opening decades of the twenty-first century. It deploys a form of institutional punishment—the concentration camp—that has a well-known history of development and circulation across different political sites and forms stretching back to the late nineteenth century. It also draws on technologies and sources of funding from commercial enterprises and research institutions that operate outside China, throughout the West, and on private paramilitary expertise developed in the US wars in Iraq. President Trump is reported to have encouraged Xi Jinping to build the camps.[22]

Acknowledging that all states are racist, and that they also exchange and circulate techniques of racialising governance, brings us back to our opening observations about the parochial nature of contemporary scholarship on racism. Racial states currently circulate techniques and technologies of governance much further and faster than anti-racist scholars circulate knowledge, analyses and theories. This is suggestive of an urgent need

[21] R. Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 2007, p. 38.

[22] See D. Byler, I. Franceschini and N. Loubere, eds., *Xinjiang Year Zero*, Canberra, ANU Press, 2022; and G. Roche, 'Xinjiang denialists are only aiding imperialism', *The Nation*, 6 July 2021; https://www.thenation.com/article/world/china-xinjiang-genocide-denial/ (accessed 18 May 2022).

for us to think about race comparatively and globally, moving beyond both the typical 'provincial' north Atlantic focus of anti-racist scholarship and the 'China-centric' approach that denies the significance of race in China. We have attempted to advance a concept of state racism that allows for this, and enables us to think about racism in China, Mongolia, Myanmar, India, the UK and Australia as interconnected phenomenon. We consider that an analysis that does anything less—that isolates racism in particular incidents, individuals, states or segments of the world system—inevitably enables its practice somewhere else. This only intensifies the vulnerability of those individuals and populations that are threatened with finding themselves on the wrong side of the racial *caesura*, one step closer to their premature death.

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