

Ayşe Çiçek

## **„Political Re-education Camps” in Xinjiang as a part of panopticon-like Society: Clashing Discourses of Western and Chinese Media**

### **Abstract**

Today, we see crimes against humanity in the 21st century in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region within the borders of China. Human rights violations experienced by Uyghurs living in the aforementioned geography for centuries are not a new development, but they remain up-to-date. The state's approach to the Uyghur people has evolved into a new dimension with the camps, which are described as vocational training centers by the state and also known as political re-education camps and internment camps in the literature. These camps, which are part of the state's security policies, have inevitably been the subject of many research, especially in the context of human rights violations. This article explores how political re-education camps, unlike others, are represented in some Western media sources and in the Chinese media, using the method of critical discourse analysis. The analysis revealed that the camps have been a part of a panopticon-like society and places where the lives of Uyghurs are surveilled from every angle, and both violation of rights and political indoctrination have been experienced. However, these places have been portrayed by the Chinese media as places where minorities have been rendered safe, enabling stability, security and development.

**Keywords:** re-education camps, internment camps, China, Uyghurs, securitization, power relations, critical discourse analysis

### **Introduction**

Uyghur-China conflict is a conflict which has a long history behind it and Uyghur people constitute a weak party of this conflict whose life conditions have been discussed mostly in the context of human rights violations. International

organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have published many reports about how People's Republic of China (PRC) has violated the human rights and freedom of Uyghur people. Fact that neither China nor United Nations fulfill their responsibility to protect human rights and freedom of Uyghur people has worsened their situation and deprived them of even their very basic rights and freedoms. In Xinjiang, basic human rights have been violated which must be protected by state according to the International Conventions of UN such as Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Convention on Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination, Convention against Torture, and other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. The right to a fair trial, the right to freedom and security, cultural rights, freedom of religion and conscience, and freedom of thought are some of the violated rights. Dominance and surveillance of Chinese government on Uyghur people used to prevail in the twentieth century, but the intensity of the domination has increased more and more especially since the second half of 2010's, after the so-called „political re-education camps” were established, which are described as mass internment camps in the literature. Re-education camps have taken a part of Chinese security policies and the government denied to accept the existence of these camps at the beginning.

This article aims to answer the following questions: how political re-education camps are represented in the discourses of western media and Chinese media? How power relations in re-education camps in Xinjiang do reflect on the discourses of the western and Chinese media? How do the dominance and surveillance show themselves in the everyday life of Uyghurs in camps as ordinary people?<sup>1</sup> To answer these questions in the first part of the research the literature on security policies and political re-education camps in Xinjiang will be scrutinized and the main issues in the literature will be summarized. The second part continues with the methodology and discussion of critical discourse analysis. In the third part, the discourses of the chosen media will be discussed. Firstly it will be focused on western media such as BBC (of British origin), CNN (of US origin), and Der Spiegel (of German origin) because they bring up the re-education camps more than other media channels. Another reason to choose these channels is that western media have ensured freedom of expression and a free press in comparison to media in authoritarian regimes. Even though Chinese media acts as a propaganda machine of the authoritarian regime, the discourses of one

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<sup>1</sup> Ordinary people are people who are excluded from political decision making processes and those who cannot access to social and economic resources equally as the dominant classes. In this paper you can identify dominant class with Han Chinese people and ordinary people with Uyghur or other minorities which they suffer under government policies.

of them, People’s Daily Online, will be considered. Thus, it will be possible to evaluate and compare discourses in both national media and western media. The character of China’s authoritarian regime makes itself visible in some democracy indexes of world countries. For example, in the Democracy Matrix of University Würzburg, China ranked among 176 countries at the 172nd place as a hard autocracy<sup>2</sup>. The volume of this kind of autocracy is the hardest version of autocracy. According to global freedom scores of Freedom House in 2022, the country is defined as a „not free” country having especially low score at political rights<sup>3</sup>, but it may not be defended that the country has better conditions in the meaning of civil rights. China destroy minority cultures and identities in the country as a whole, but the major minority in Xinjiang are Uyghurs.

This study contributes to the literature by examining the representation of the camps in the differing discourses of the Western and the Chinese media.

## Method

Critical discourse analysis as a qualitative research method presents a suitable framework for analyzing visual, auditory and written data. In this study this method is used for analyzing the discourses of written media which take Uyghur issue in their agenda. The news of BBC, CNN, Der Spiegel and People’s Daily Online on re-education camps between the years of 2017-2022 have been analyzed, now that these camps have been in use since 2017. Two news from each media have been chosen, because examination of more data would exceed the limits of the article. Although some of the news on re-education camps have a headline containing the word „camp”, the content of this news mainly focuses on the history of the Uyghurs, China’s pressure on the Uyghurs in general, and what is happening in China, but it does not specifically focus on the camps. For this reason, the news offering more comprehensive information about the camps was chosen. Each selected media channel has a lot of news on the subject. However, news samples that do not provide any information about the essence of the camps were not examined in this study. The selected news has representative character and reflects many issues related to the camps. The news that superficially mentions the existence of the camps was excluded from the analysis.

Discourse draws attention to communicational dimension of language and shows that texts of speeches or written documents can be analyzed not only in terms of grammatic and philology but also in terms of message to be delivered

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<sup>2</sup> *Democracy Matrix*, <https://www.democracymatrix.com/ranking> (10 VIII 2022).

<sup>3</sup> *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/china/freedom-world/2022> (10 VIII 2022).

and in terms of relationship of language use to social structure. Gee (1999) and Gal (1995) agree that the use of language has a political dimension<sup>4</sup> and that speech has a political significance<sup>5</sup>. The term discourse has been defined in various forms by intellectuals who study on discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough (2004) defines discourse as

ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feelings, beliefs and so forth, and the social world. Particular aspects of the world may be represented differently, so we are generally in the position of having to consider the relationship between different discourses<sup>6</sup>.

This definition reminds the researchers that they face a variety of discourses based on a variety of world views, beliefs, and thoughts in the social world. It means that understanding of social realities depend on comparison of the discourses, which clash sometimes with another and sometimes overlap.

Discourse analysis is characterized as thinking about discourse and a way of turning discourse into data<sup>7</sup>. There is not only one way of application of discourse analysis and this may be applied in many disciplines. The methods related to discourse analysis are the methods such as critical discourse analysis (CDA), conversation analysis, and content analysis<sup>8</sup>. While discourse analysis is applied by making a detailed linguistic analysis in fields such as philology, critical discourse analysis rather provides a critical reading of social issues through the text. In social science fields such as sociology, political science, and international relations, critical discourse analysis is mostly used to examine power relations in society, and social structure – actor relations, approaches to different identities and disadvantaged groups. CDA focuses basically on analysing explicit and inexplicit forms of „relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language<sup>9</sup>”. Wodak (2011) underlines that CDA analyzes how social inequalities are expressed, constituted and legitimized by using language<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> P.J. Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, London 1999.

<sup>5</sup> S. Gal, *Language and the „Arts of Resistance*, „Cultural Anthropology” 1995, vol. 10, no. 3, August, p. 407.

<sup>6</sup> N. Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse. Textual Analysis for Social Research*, London & New York 2004, p. 124.

<sup>7</sup> H. Çelik, H. Ekşi, *Söylem Analizi*, „Marmara Üniversitesi Atatürk Eğitim Fakültesi Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi” 2008, vol. 27, no. 27, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> T. Gür, *Post-Modern Bir Araştırma Yöntemi Olarak Söylem Çözümlemesi*, „Zeitschrift für die Welt der Türken” 2013, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 191-192, quoted by Phillips and Hardy, 2002.

<sup>9</sup> R. Wodak, *What CDA is about – A summary of its History, Important Concepts and Its Developments*, [in:] *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, ed. R. Wodak, M. Meyer, London 2011.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*.

Van Dijk (1993) is interested in the role of discourse in the (re) production and challenge of dominance in the study of social inequalities<sup>11</sup>. Dominance is understood using of social power by actors like elites, institutions and groups and this leads to various kinds of social inequalities such as political, class, ethnic and gender inequalities<sup>12</sup>. While these inequalities increase the power of those in power, in our case, ethnic minorities are weakened. As a result, social groups that are exposed to inequality become the underclass in society. Wodak (2011) states that every CDA research involves inevitably the concept of power, the concept of ideology, and the concept of history<sup>13</sup>. Thus, CDA enables to analyse *pressures from above* as well as *possibilities of resistance* to power with Wodak's (2011) own word<sup>14</sup>, and both *'top-down' relations of dominance* and *'bottom-up' relations of resistance and compliance* with van Dijk's (1993) word<sup>15</sup>. Therefore CDA cannot be exercised good enough without paying attention to social structure. Ideology is an important term for CDA in the analysis of power relations in society.

According to Wodak (2011), ideology plays an essential role in constituting and preserving of unequal power relations<sup>16</sup>. In all forms of discourse analysis, managing the mind of others comes into prominence as a most important function of text and talk<sup>17</sup>. Discourses of those in power aim usually to influence people's and opposition's mind and make them think like elites. It is useful to remind an important point of CDA: language is not a powerful instrument on its own and the thing that makes language powerful is using of language by powerful people<sup>18</sup>. In other words, the power elites have privileged access to discourse and they are groups that have a lot to say but at the same time are responsible for social inequalities<sup>19</sup>. From these ideas it can be concluded that ordinary people do not have equal access to discourse and their representation on discourses is based on the thoughts of powerful people. That is why CDA tries to comprehend and clarify the point of view of the weak and analyzes the language use of those in power<sup>20</sup>. According to van Dijk (1993), different forms of social exclusion express *discourse dominance*, which he calls *communicative discrimination* as well. He gives some examples for this kind of dominance. Men that exclude women from

<sup>11</sup> T.A. van Dijk, *Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis*, „Discourse & Society” 1993, vol. 4, no. 2, p. 249.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 250.

<sup>13</sup> R. Wodak, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>15</sup> T.A. Van Dijk, *op.cit.*, p. 250.

<sup>16</sup> R. Wodak, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>17</sup> T.A. Van Dijk, *op.cit.*, p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> R. Wodak, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>19</sup> T.A. Van Dijk, *op.cit.*, p. 255.

<sup>20</sup> R. Wodak, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

meetings, whites that restrict the access of blacks to press, immigration officers who do not allow social workers to interrogations of refugees are social actors which dominate discourse<sup>21</sup>.

## Political Re-education Camps and Uyghurs

Uyghurs are an indigenous people, that live in the northwest of People's Republic of China (PRC). The existence of the Uyghur people in this geography has been known in history since the 8th century<sup>22</sup>. Although this territory is called today Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), it is known as „East Turkestan” in history and especially in Turkic countries. Many Turkic dynasties ruled this territory that was named Turkestan in different times in history such as Uyghur Imperium (744-840) and Turk-Mongolian (1218-1749)<sup>23</sup>. Before Chinese invasion in 1949, this region was a separate region outside of China and declared its independence twice, once in 1933 and once in 1944<sup>24</sup>. Both attempts for an independent state could not survive due to Chinese interference. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, this region where the Uyghurs lived came under the control of China.

Uyghurs are now considered one of the minorities (*minzu*) in China. However, before 1949, the non-Han population (Uyghur, Kazakh, Kyrgyz etc.) was dominant in the region. Many Han were forcibly displaced from other parts of China to Xinjiang. While in 1949 93% of the population was Uyghurs and a smaller number of Turkic groups, in 1997 the proportion of Uyghurs dropped to 47%, and the proportion of ethnic Chinese reached to 42%<sup>25</sup>. This situation reveals that through forced migration the Uyghurs were made a minority in the region as a state strategy and that the state prevented them to demand self-determination.

Since 1950s, the Uyghur people have resisted at various times against the control of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). They criticized the occupation of their land and the exploitation of resources by the Chinese government, its policies towards minorities, and expressed the violence they have been subjected to despite their non-violent protest in the 1980s-90s (in Baren, Ghulja). The last of the open resistance in the Xinjiang region was the Urumqi events in 2009. In this

<sup>21</sup> T.A. Van Dijk, *op.cit.*, p. 260.

<sup>22</sup> M. Dillon, *Xinjiang-China's Muslim Far Northwest*, London 2004, p. 9, quoted by Mackerras 1972.

<sup>23</sup> A. Türköz, *Doğu Türkistan'da İnsan Hakları*, İstanbul 2010, p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> A. Oyuk, *op.cit.*, p. 76-79.

<sup>25</sup> Amnesty International (1999), *Gross Violations of Human Rights in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region*, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa17/018/1999/en/> (31 VIII 2022).

incident, many people lost their lives and China’s continued strike-hard logic increased the intensity of the conflict<sup>26</sup>.

Despite the long history of conflict between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government, the events in the region became visible to the world public opinion after 9/11<sup>27</sup>. One of the sources that shows 2001 as the breaking point for the approach to the Uyghur – China conflict is the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC). When we examine the reports from 1999, 2000 and 2001, we see that the conflict item is given as autonomy and regional autonomy. As of 2002 the separation is definitely mentioned as conflict item besides other items such as religious autonomy, and system/ideology<sup>28</sup>. Although there are many reasons that cause this conflict<sup>29</sup> we avoid to discuss these reasons here because this article focusses mainly on re-education camps. Many scholars agree that the rhetoric of war on terror predominates China’s approach to the Uyghurs. While Millward and Peterson (2020) state that the CCP framed the Uyghur resistance entirely as terrorism<sup>30</sup>, Greitens et al. (2020)<sup>31</sup> and Raza (2019)<sup>32</sup> state that China’s discourse has shifted from separatism to terrorism.

From the second half of the 2010s, re-education camps became a new form of China’s domination of the Uyghurs. Some research and reports even suggested that re-education camps have existed since 2014 in form of mass detainment and internment<sup>33</sup>. The general opinion is that these camps have existed since 2017 and Chinese government denied the existence of camps for the first two years<sup>34</sup>. It is estimated that between 800,000 and 2 million Uyghurs and Muslims of Turkic origin have been in political re-education camps since December 2018<sup>35</sup>. Finley

<sup>26</sup> A. Oyuk, *op.cit.*, p. 94.

<sup>27</sup> G. Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs Strangers in Their Own Land*, New York 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research (HIIC), <https://hiik.de/konfliktbarometer/bisherige-ausgaben/> (30 VIII 2022).

<sup>29</sup> For a detailed conflict analysis of Uyghur-China conflict see also: A. Oyuk, *Uighuren auf der Suche nach Gerechtigkeit und Selbstbestimmung. Eine Konfliktanalyse*, Akademiker Verlag 2014.

<sup>30</sup> J. Millward, D. Peterson, *China’s System of Oppression in Xinjiang: How it developed and how to curb it?*, „Global China” September 2020, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> S.C. Greitens, M. Lee, E. Yazici, *Counterterrorism and Preventive Repression. China’s Changing Strategy in Xinjiang*, „International Security”, vol. 44, no. 3, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Z. Raza, *China’s ‘Political Re-Education Camps of Xinjiang’s Uyghur Muslims*, „Asian Affairs” 2019, vol. 50, no. 4, p. 495.

<sup>33</sup> J.S. Finley, *Securitization, Insecurity and Conflict in Contemporary Xinjiang: Has PRC Counter-Terrorism Evolved into State Terror?*, „Central Asian Survey” 2019, vol. 38, no. 1, p. 3; *Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP) Report* [21 VIII 2018], [https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/MassDetention\\_of\\_Uyghurs.pdf](https://docs.uhrp.org/pdf/MassDetention_of_Uyghurs.pdf) (30 VIII 2022).

<sup>34</sup> B. Westcott, *China Denies Having ‘Concentration Camps’, Tell US to ‘Stop Interfering’*, CNN, 6 V 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/05/06/asia/china-us-xinjiang-concentration-camps-intl/index.html> (1 IX 2022).

<sup>35</sup> J.S. Finley, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

(2021) points out that this is *the largest forced incarceration of an ethno-religious minority anywhere in the world since the Second World War*<sup>36</sup>. In this way, the author underlines a great danger humanity faces.

Before addressing the conditions and human rights violations in the internment camps, it is necessary to evaluate what role the state has assigned to these camps and how these camps function. The camps are named officially as „Vocational Training Internment Camps” in Xinjiang and this term comprises not only vocational training, which is only a small part of „indoctrination package”<sup>37</sup>. At the first glance it is possible to consider that the camps are a part of the security policies. However, previous research reminds us that many factors should be taken into consideration while determining about functions. Functions of political re-education camps can be summarized as security strategy, political indoctrination and ensuring economic and political stability.

Finley (2019) argues that the mass internment is seen as a security practice in Xinjiang and that Chinese state defines security as a matter of cultural differences<sup>38</sup>. In this case Uyghurs have been reconstructed as existential threats with their whole belonging to the Han-Chinese nation and the state uses this threat to legalise its extraordinary interventions to the lives of Uyghurs<sup>39</sup>. Greitens, Lee and Yazici (2020) as well take the camps as a part of security strategy and remark the change of China’s internal security policy. The authors emphasize that the internal security strategy of the CCP in 2017-2018 have three remarkable characteristics: increasing application of collective detention, intensive ideological re-education, and increasing pressure on Uyghur diaspora<sup>40</sup>. An important dimension of the state’s new strategy is that a change occurs *from individual to collective detention*<sup>41</sup>. Ruser (2020) points out that the camps are designed to ‘rehabilitate’ and indoctrinate inmates politically<sup>42</sup>. The internment camps and homogenization strategy through coercive assimilation should not be thought without their political economy. XUAR has importance for the new Silk Road Economic Belt and therefore Chinese government wants to ensure regional stability and considers intense securitisation in Xinjiang as a strategic imperative<sup>43</sup>. Caskey and Mur-

<sup>36</sup> J.S. Finley, *Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang*, „Journal of Genocide Research” 2021, vol. 23, no. 3, p. 348.

<sup>37</sup> A. Zenz, *Beyond the Camps: Beijing’s Long-Term Scheme of Coercive Labor, Poverty Alleviation and Social Control in Xinjiang*, „The Journal of Political Risk” 2019, vol. 7, no. 12, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> J.S. Finley, *Securitization...*, p. 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 2.

<sup>40</sup> S.C. Greitens, M. Lee, E. Yazici, *op.cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>42</sup> N. Ruser, *Documenting Xinjiang’s detention system*, „Australian Strategic Policy Institute International Cyber Policy Centre” 2020, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> A. Hayes, *Intervowen ‘Destinies’: The Significance of Xinjiang to the China Dream, the Belt and Road Initiative, and the Xi Jinping Legacy*, „Journal of Contemporary China” 2020, vol. 29, no. 121, p. 31.



tazashvili (2022) explain the ratio behind homogenization through assimilation with that this is *cheaper than costs of resistance to the regime*<sup>44</sup>. Tynen (2020) states that the detention of the masses should not be considered independently of the dispossession and displacement of the Uyghurs, while she refers how they experienced unemployment and economic crisis in 2017<sup>45</sup>. According to her „dispossession with the aid of a state security apparatus destroys the existing relationship between people and land”<sup>46</sup>.

The ethnic conflicts that China is a party are not limited to the Uyghurs, and the security policies are not only directed towards this group. However, research shows that security spendings have increased more in the areas, in which mostly minority population live in comparison to general expenditures in XUAR<sup>47</sup>. From 2016 to 2017 expenditures for detention center management increased by 239%, while spendings for social stability management by 235% and for other domestic security spendings by 351% increased<sup>48</sup>. Not only the increased security expenditures, but also the increasing pressure and surveillance mechanisms on minorities reveal the point that security policies have reached. For instance, about 1,500 companies provide to the Xinjiang public safety and surveillance industry facial, voice and gait recognition capabilities as well as other monitoring tools<sup>49</sup>. Peoples behaviors and lives both in private sphere and in public sphere are tracked with these conventional methods by China as a police state and personal data such as banking, travel, social media and everyday practices about them besides biodata like medical examinations such as DNA, blood group, retinal scan, voice print etc. are gathered<sup>50</sup>. The lives of detainees are also monitored in every aspect from the bed position to fixed work station<sup>51</sup>.

It is not possible to talk about a single type of institution where people are detained in Xinjiang. In other words, camps differ in terms of their characteristics. Ruser (2020) refers to four types of detention facilities, and their securitization degree differ from the others. These are suspected lower security re-education camps, suspected dedicated re-education camps, suspected detention centres,

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<sup>44</sup> G.W. Caskey, I. Murtazashvili, *The Predatory State and Coercive Assimilation: The Case of the Uyghurs in Xinjiang*, „SSRN Electronic Journal” 2022, p. 9.

<sup>45</sup> S. Tynen, *Dispossession and Displacement of Migrant Workers: The Impact of State Terror and Economic Development on Uyghurs in Urban Xinjiang*, „Central Asian Survey” 2020, vol. 39, no. 3, p. 304.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 306.

<sup>47</sup> G.W. Caskey, I. Murtazashvili, *op.cit.*, p. 13.

<sup>48</sup> A. Zenz, *Xinjiang’s Re-Education and Securitization Campaign: Evidence from Domestic Security Budgets*, „China Brief”, vol. 18, no. 17.

<sup>49</sup> J. Millward, D. Peterson, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> J. Stern, *Genocide in China: Uighur Re-education Camps and International Response*, „Immigration and Human Rights Law Review” 2021, vol. 3, no. 1, quoted by Wen ve Auyeuzov, 2018.

and suspected maximum security prisons<sup>52</sup>. The first type has internal barbed-wire fencing and restricts the movement of inmates between building, and these facilities have classrooms that can cause to misleading narrative and make the people think as if only education activities are being done in these facilities<sup>53</sup>. The second type of facilities was built for the detention of Uyghurs and other minorities other than Han Chinese. The security facilities of some have been reduced to a certain extent and barbed wire has been removed but have large external wall. There are watchtowers and detainees are carefully watched in these facilities. According to satellite images, there have been people who were evacuated from this facility or transferred to another place<sup>54</sup>. The third type of facilities is planned to remove people from the community and is surrounded on all four sides by a high wall, has watchtowers and is surrounded by multi-layered barbed wire<sup>55</sup>. Fourth type seems like the formal prison system<sup>56</sup>.

One of the regulations that accompanies re-education camps is that parents and children are separated from each other by the state. In this respect, children whose parents are sent to re-education camps or other detention centers are also given to boarding schools or orphanages by the state regardless of the age of the child. Children of „double-detained” parents continue to live under state protection. Zenz (2019) and Finley (2019) point out that the establishment of educational facilities coincided with the re-education camps built in 2017<sup>57</sup>. This situation reveals that the separation of parents and children from each other is already planned<sup>58</sup>. Through the strategy of intergenerational separation, the state has turned children into children in need of protection, while simultaneously built orphanages and boarding schools. The eyewitnesses of some Han Chinese teachers prove that the state does not take good care of these children in need of protection and does not provide the necessary care for them<sup>59</sup>. On the other hand, as Zenz (2019) argues, the state uses a language of compassion, as if taking good care of these children:

The warm, almost emotional language used to describe the „care”, „love” and „nurture” of the Party and the government towards the re-education detainees and their children is of course designed to make intergenerational separation some-

<sup>52</sup> N. Ruser, *op.cit.*, p. 6-10.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6-7.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 8.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>57</sup> J.S. Finley, *op.cit.*, p. 8; A. Zenz, *Break Their Roots: Evidence for China's Parent-Child Separation Campaign in Xinjiang*, „The Journal of Polical Risk” 2019, vol. 7, no. 7, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> J.S. Finley, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> A. Zenz, *op.cit.*, p. 2.

how seem more acceptable. At the same time, it divulges the intention of the Party to aspire towards some kind of metaphorical „parenthood”<sup>60</sup>.

The project of re-education camps and intergenerational separation is, in a nutshell, a story of people’s destruction. These two developments should also be seen as part of the state’s „second-generation minority policy”, that have been in force since 2011. While this policy aims to build a single stronger national identity, it narrows the possibility of recognition of minorities and ethnic identities<sup>61</sup>. Tobin (2022) notes that internment camps and inter-generational separation together lead to social death<sup>62</sup>. The family is an environment where culture is kept alive from generation to generation, and the bond between family members is tried to be destroyed by the disintegration of the family. In addition to violations of individual, family, and community rights, it prevents the transmission of Uyghur identity, which includes culture, belief, and many other components, from generation to generation, and while doing this, it uses state ideology and force. These practices are not only against human dignity but also point to a wearing process for the Uyghurs and are a trauma that has an impact on various generations, which is called a „multigenerational trauma”<sup>63</sup>. Another critical point is the securitization of boarding schools in Xinjiang, like internment facilities. Schools are required to conduct video surveillance, which is also linked to public security bodies, and this surveillance should be done in a way that is not blind spots<sup>64</sup>.

Uyghurs are sent to internment camps for various reasons, and even if the reasons for their detention are non-criminal and even ordinary acts in terms of human rights and freedoms, they are kept under control and surveillance just because of the state’s skeptical approach. The state’s skepticism towards the ordinary behavior and actions of the individual and the limitation of freedoms is certainly not a new situation in China. Even before the re-education camps were established, organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch drew attention to violations such as torture, forced abortion, unfair trial and enforced disappearance in their reports<sup>65</sup>. Human rights violations are a problem faced by both Uyghurs inside the camps and Uyghurs outside the camps. The forms of these violations might change. Uyghurs outside the camp are not free

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 10.

<sup>61</sup> J. Leibold, *Toward A Second Generation of Ethnic Policies?*, „China Brief” 2012, vol. 12, no. 13; S.C. Greitens, M. Lee, E. Yazici, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>62</sup> D. Tobin, *Genocidal Processes: Social Death in Xinjiang*, „Ethnic and Racial Studies” 2022, vol. 45, no. 16, p. 109.

<sup>63</sup> J.S. Finley, *op.cit.*, p. 5, quoted by Thum, quoted by Shih, 2018.

<sup>64</sup> A. Zenz, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>65</sup> Amnesty International, *op.cit.*; Human Rights Watch, *China Events 2009*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2010/country-chapters/china-and-tibet> (1 IX 2022).

from the control and surveillance of the Communist Party. As a matter of fact, the visits of the Han Chinese to the homes of the Uyghurs since 2016 are an indication of both the control and the sinicisation policy<sup>66</sup>. Finley (2019) points out that these visits take different forms in rural and urban areas. Intervention in private space is limited to visits in urban areas, while staying at home in rural areas<sup>67</sup>.

One of the issues that many scholars discuss is how to define the crisis and the wide variety of rights violations experienced by the Uyghurs. Although some sources include some elements of the definition of genocide according to the United Nations' Convention on Genocide, they define China's treatment to the Uyghurs as cultural genocide<sup>68</sup>, since proof of intent is mandatory to call this treatment as „genocide”<sup>69</sup>. The term „crime against humanity” is a widely used characterization for the rights violations experienced by the Uyghurs<sup>70</sup>.

In her article, Finley (2019) listed the reasons why Uyghurs and other minorities were taken to internment camps as follows: „extreme” religious practices (such as wearing headscarves, reading the Quran at funerals), sharing religious content on phones or computers, using Western social media applications and websites, travelling abroad or studying abroad, having relatives abroad, communicating with foreigners (for example with journalists), prior criminal convictions, contacting with a former and current convict, criticizing policies, not being patriotic enough, and insufficient Chinese language<sup>71</sup>. As an actor with privileged access to discourse, the state has the monopoly of determining what is legal or illegal and what is extreme or moderate. All of these readings on internment camps and securitization show that not only internment camps and prisons but also schools, workplaces and even homes for Muslim minorities as a private space create a prison-like appearance. This situation shows „panopticum model” spreads to whole society<sup>72</sup> with Foucault's (1992) words. It means that wherever individuals go, they are under pressure and control, no matter which institution they are a part of. China's security apparatus not only aims to create a panopticum-like society, but also aims to create obedient bodies:

But the body is also directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs<sup>73</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Z. Raza, *op.cit.*, p. 489.

<sup>67</sup> J.S. Finley, *op.cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> J. Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 30; A. Zenz, *op.cit.*, p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> J.S. Finley, *Why Scholars...*, p. 363.

<sup>70</sup> A. Oyuk, *op.cit.*, p. 144; J. Stern, *op.cit.*, p. 23.

<sup>71</sup> J.S. Finley, *Securitization...*, p. 5-6.

<sup>72</sup> M. Foucault, *Hapishanenin Doğuşu*, Ankara 1992, p. 382.

<sup>73</sup> Idem, *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison*, New York 1995, p. 25.

Re-education camps, prisons, schools, and many other institutions serve to create obedient bodies. However, the delicate balance between security and freedom is shifting in favor of security against freedom. According to Tobin (2022) political re-education camp system isolates Uyghurs and demands their recognition of Han cultural dominance and their „backwardness”<sup>74</sup>. The aim of the state is to make Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities feel that their own culture, belief and existence are worthless and to eradicate them by means of indoctrination, torture and various surveillance methods, both inside and outside the camps. At the same time, minorities are compelled to accept the culture and lifestyles of the majority society. In this way, it is observed that the majority society is also a part of power relations.

## Western Media and Representation of Re-education Camps

### 1. BBC News about the camps

#### News 1:

**Headline:** „Their goal is to destroy everyone’: Uighur camp detainees allege systematic rape”<sup>75</sup>

**Date:** 2 II 2021

**News spot:** *Women in China’s „re-education” camps for Uighurs have been systematically raped, sexually abused, and tortured, according to detailed new accounts obtained by the BBC. You may find some of the details in this story distressing*<sup>76</sup>.

**Content:** This news focuses on the experiences and eyewitness accounts of Uyghur, Kazakh, and Uzbek women who stayed in an internment camp in Xinjiang between 9-18 months. The first part of the headline of the news is based on the expression of an Uyghur woman, while the second part of the title belongs to journalists who approach systematic rape as an allegation of the former detainees. Using the word „allege” in the headline of the news shows that the woman’s statements are viewed skeptically, and it is said that they cannot be fully verified. The documents submitted by the woman, the statements of the previous detainees, satellite images of the camp where she stayed, and the information she gave

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<sup>74</sup> D. Tobin, *op.cit.*, p. 109.

<sup>75</sup> M. Hill, D. Campanale, J. Gunter, ‘*Their Goal is to Destroy Everyone’: Uighur Camp Detainees Alleged Systematic Rape* [2 II 2021], <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-55794071> (2 IX 2022).

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

are the same. In this way, the reliability of the news was tried to be tested. It is noteworthy that BBC journalists approached the first-hand accounts impartially at the beginning and tried to measure as much as possible whether the narratives were consistent within themselves. The spot describes how the state and its police dominate women's bodies and warns the reader before reading this news because this news contains a sad story.

While describing internment camps, victim women used the term „concentration camps”. In the camps, Uyghur and other Muslim women are subjugated and their identities are destroyed by violating their health rights, implementing torture, rape, and political indoctrination. Women express the purpose of the state as „to destroy everyone” and „to destroy everyone's soul”. The women were forced to take pills and were injected with a vaccine involuntarily without any explanation. So they did not know for what they used these medicaments. Another horrific intervention to health is forced sterilization. The women mentioned in their narratives that there was gang rape in the camps and that they were exposed to sexual violence. „Trampling on belly”, „pushing electric stick inside genital track of women”, and „electrocute” are only some of the torture methods. An eyewitness account of a policewoman verifies that gang rape and electrocuting are common in the camp. The internment facilities have cells and classroom, and a photograph in news indicate high-security equipment. Political indoctrination according to the news includes singing patriotic songs, watching propaganda programs, and memorizing the books of President Xi Jinping. When the detainee fails the test, they are deprived of food and exposed to torture. The images and slogans of the President take part on the walls in the camps.

While the Chinese government tries to dominate women's bodies with various torture methods and rapes, it also tries to control their thoughts with so-called training and brainwashing curricula.

**Actors:** In the news, the opinions of a British diplomat and a scientist were included, and China's attitude towards the allegations and the approach of human rights organizations to the subject were briefly mentioned. British diplomat described Xi Jinping as „an architect of policy against Uyghurs”. Prominent actors related to this social issue are China, Uyghurs, USA (as home to the Uyghur diaspora), and human rights organizations. Human rights organizations argue that the government deprives Uyghurs of religious and other freedoms, and their oppressive system includes detention, surveillance, forced sterilization, and indoctrination.

While the US government puts forward that China's actions such as mass detention are equivalent to genocide, the Chinese government describes this as a „lies and absurd allegations”. The Chinese government responded to the US government and argued that the camps exist for the re-education of Uyghurs and other minorities, while it did not respond to BBC's allegations and refrained

from describing the camps as detention camps and preferred to call them „vocational education and training centers”. Government attempts to cover up the realities with discourse „education” and „woman rights respected by the Chinese government”.

**Representation:** Re-education camps are represented as places where women are systematically raped, abused, tortured, sterilized, and indoctrinated into „mainstream Chinese culture”.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** The BBC tries to influence people’s thinking by including the narratives of women who experienced human rights violations in the camps and the Chinese government’s superficial responses to the allegations. This policy is discussed as a response to a terror attack by „Uyghur separatists”. At one point in the news, Uyghurs are used together with the term „separatist” and associated with a „terrorist attack”.

## News 2:

**The headline of the news:** „Data leak reveals how China ‘brainwashes’ Uyghurs in prison camps”<sup>77</sup>

**Date:** 24 XI 2019

**News spot:** *Leaked documents detail for the first time China’s systematic brainwashing of hundreds of thousands of Muslims in a network of high-security prison camps*<sup>78</sup>.

**Content:** The news is based on leaked data. The headline of the news explains that the „prison camps” in China are used as the ideological apparatus of the state and function as imposing the official ideology on the Uyghurs. Spot also claims that the leaked data has proven to be a systematic brainwashing project aimed at Muslims. The detention of the Muslim Uyghur community without any trial indicates a violation of the right to freedom and security mentioned in the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. One of the images used in the news is the photograph of women and men in the classroom environment. The women wear tracksuit-like uniforms in red and the men in blue, with a Chinese book in front of them. The photo, headline, and spot go hand in hand, and all of them are a sign of indoctrination.

The focus of the news is the content of the instructions in the camps. The orders in the documents emphasize the following rules: „never allow escape”, „increase discipline and punishment”, and „strict secrecy”. Another order indicates

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<sup>77</sup> *Data Leak Reveals How China ‘Brainwashes’ Uyghurs in Prison Camps* [24 XI 2019], <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-50511063> (2 IX 2022).

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*.

that Mandarin studies have a „remedial” character and a priority. Other instructions sign transforming „students” and ensuring „full video surveillance of dormitories and classrooms” without blind spots. The detainees’ lives are monitored from the classroom to their bed position and no one changes their fixed position since this is strictly forbidden. Complete surveillance, forced detention and instructions show that the so-called students have no private sphere and that the state has an authoritarian character.

The article includes the views of a member of the Human Rights Watch and a lawyer. One of the issues mentioned by the HRW member is psychological torture. These camps purpose the transformation of the behaviors, beliefs, and language of Muslim minorities. While converting detainees, China compels them to admit that their previous actions were „illegal, dangerous, and criminal”. The lawyer, on the other hand, sees this situation as mass brainwashing that serves to wipe the Uyghurs in Xinjiang „off the face of the Earth”.

**Actors:** Despite China’s rhetoric that attendance to the camps is voluntary and aims to combat with „extremism”, the data leaked to ICIJ reveals that Muslims and Uyghurs have been forcibly hold there and that the camps have been like prisons. BBC Panorama appears as a media organ that sees and reports official documents of China. The BBC uses the terms „Muslims”, „Muslim Uyghurs” and „detainees” when talking about those held in the camps, while China refers to them as „students” in official documents.

**Representation:** The political re-education camps have been represented as highly securitized „prison camps” where the Uyghurs are brainwashed and hold there without any trial. The instructions and surveillance demonstrate a panopticon-like nature of the camps with an exception. The Uyghurs and other minorities know very well that their lives are surveilled all around. The examined news focuses on just one but important dimension of the camps.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** The BBC aims to influence the world’s public opinion through discourses on indoctrination, punishment, and imprisonment, which have been proven by leaked official documents. At the same time, it is explained that the system is an attempt to eradicate the Uyghur identity, by including the views of a lawyer and a member of Human Rights Watch.



## 2. CNN News about the camps

### News 1:

**The headline of the news:** „Watched, judged, and detained”<sup>79</sup>

**Date:** 18 II 2020

**News spot:** *Leaked Chinese government records reveal detailed surveillance reports on Uyghur families and Beijing’s justification for mass detentions*<sup>80</sup>.

**Content:** The headline, spot, and content of the news describe how the Uyghurs and all their extended family members were watched before and after they were sent to the camps, how they were judged, and detained and how China justified the mass detentions. In the news, it is noteworthy that although it is known that they are not dissident and extremist in the neighborhood they live in, the state has drawn up a detailed profile of Mamattohti and another family’s family members in terms of age, occupation, religious activities, and reliability. Not only those who were sent to the camps or sentenced to prison, but also other members of the family have a profile. Each individual detained in the camps has a separate file and reason for detention in camp, their personal information and „verdict” about behavior in the camp are written in this file. The fact that the release dates are not included in the personal files is interpreted as the forced employment of the people in the „industrial park” after their release.

According to the document in the news, the reasons for detention in the camps include: „daily religious practices” (going to Friday prayers, Eid prayers, funeral practices), having a non-used passport, and being „prone to being radicalized” because of religious traditions, „wearing a face veil” of a woman (it is a detention reason for the woman’s husband as well), „unauthorized pilgrimage”, „having a criminal record”, „traveling to 26 sensitive countries” and violation of family planning policy (having children more than three). The news emphasizes that through the camps, China does not fight against extremism, but against the culture and beliefs of Muslim Uyghurs, who are Chinese citizens.

**Actors:** Actors mentioned in the news are the Chinese government, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Uyghurs, and Uyghur exiles in the Netherland and Turkey, and CNN. When CNN sent the documents to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it did not receive a response. In a speech he made in the following days, the Chinese Foreign Minister said that those who came to China before did not witness a concentration camp or persecution, and invited media organs and diplomats who wanted to see the truth about China. He denied the existence

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<sup>79</sup> I. Watson, B. Westcott, *Watched, Judged, Detained* [18 II 2020], <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/02/asia/xinjiang-china-karakax-document-intl-hnk/> (3 IX 2022).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

of the „concentration camps” and regarded it as 100% rumor and fake news. He defended that the Muslim minorities practice their religion liberally. CNN, on the other hand, stated that their attempt to visit the detention center was blocked by the local authorities in Xinjiang. China tries to legitimize mass arrests under the name of fighting Islamic extremism, and it has acknowledged the existence of camps, what they call „training centers”, as of 2017. The statesmen in Beijing claimed that the documents have been misinterpreted in bad faith, but as of the second half of 2019, the Chinese government noticed the interest of the world countries in the detention centers and started to work on counter-discourses. Exiled Uyghurs, on the other hand, describe a „political/ethnic cleansing” carried out through detention centres.

**Representation:** The camps have been portrayed as places where people are held for their non-criminal, ordinary behavior, where they are forcibly taught Chinese, certain behavioral patterns, and where people are ideologically educated. The cells in the camps are overcrowded, torture and death are some of the incidents in the camps. In the news, information was given about the camps over 4 camps in Karakax.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** The news was written by examining the leaked data by experts and it was understood that the documents were original. Through the stories of two Uyghur families in these documents, CNN tries to influence the views by showing the reasons for their detention in the camps, how the detailed surveillance („far-reaching surveillance system”) and judgment work, and based on the narratives of Uyghurs abroad whose families are in Xinjiang and who lost contact with their families.

## News 2:

**The headline of the news:** „Thousands of Uyghur Muslims detained in Chinese ‘political education’ camps”<sup>81</sup>

**Date:** II 2018

**News spot:** There is no spot.

**Content:** The headline of the news focuses on Uyghur Muslims detained in the camps, while its content briefly covers the brainwashing process and rather the gigantic extent of surveillance inside and outside the camps. It has been reported that more men live in the camps than women. Places that used to be schools or public buildings have been converted into detention camps. People

<sup>81</sup> S. Jiang, *Thousand of Uyghur Muslims Detained in Chinese ‘Political Education’ Camps* [2 II 2018], <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/02/asia/china-xinjiang-detention-camps-intl/index.html> (3 IX 2022).

presumed to be prone to „Islamic extremism” are subjected to brainwashing, compelled to glorify the Communist Party, sing revolutionary songs, and express regret for acts deemed transgression (such as going abroad, praying in a mosque). The anti-extremism law enacted by the government in 2017 banned veiling in public, long beards, and homeschooling. A photograph used in the news consists of posters hung on the walls of the Urumqi city. On some posters, there are pictures of women with their faces covered, men with beards, and T-shirts with Turkestan flags, and these images have a prohibition symbol on them.

There is no detailed information in the news about what happened in the camps. In general, the news concentrates on the security apparatus of the police state, explaining that the public is kept under control by means of cameras, obligatory GPS in cars and DNA samples.

**Actors:** The actors whose thoughts and discourses are included in the news are Chinese authorities, CNN, Human Rights Watch (HRW), World Uyghur Congress (WUC), Radia Free Asia (RFA), and Amnesty International. The discourses of actors other than the Chinese authorities overlap with each other. The Chinese government blames „Muslim Uyghur separatists”, who are for an independent state, for the tensions in the region. In this discourse, the government mentions religion, national belonging, and separatism together. One of the CCP’s senior officials insists that all ethnic groups are given equal rights and freedoms and that their culture and traditions are protected. Although CNN demanded information about the political education camps from Chinese authorities many times, they did not respond to the allegations, but they presented the camp facilities as effective methods for deradicalizing the residents. A China researcher from HRW underlines that the detentions in camps are „unlawful”, not based on „legal documentation” and their length have been indefinite, while Amnesty International remarks on discrimination in the context of social and individual rights. WUC points out that 3-4 people from every household were detained and its leader – Rebia Kadeer, argues that this camp was designed to „eliminate the Uyghurs”.

**Representation:** Re-education camps are referred to as (so-called) education camps and detention camps in the news. These camps are places with „cramped conditions” where political indoctrination and confessions of previous actions take place. Camps are described as a part of „ubiquitous surveillance”.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** CNN featured the views of actors and human rights organizations defending Uyghur rights and revealed the extent of surveillance through language uses such as „unrelenting campaigns”, „strengthening security forces”, „repressive reign” of government, and „spreading of political indoctrination”. This media organ tries to influence the opinions of the readers with discourses such as inequality, discrimination, and repressive character of the regime.

### 3. Der Spiegel's News about the Camps

#### News 1:

**The headline of the news:** „Unterdrückung in Xinjiang: Wie China einen Gulag für Muslime errichtete“<sup>82</sup> (Repression in Xinjiang: How China Established a Gulag for Muslims<sup>83</sup>)

**Date:** 24 V 2022

**News spot:** *Die Xinjiang Police Files richten den Fokus auf eines der größten Menschenrechtsvergehen unserer Zeit: Rücksichtslos erschloss sich Chinas Führung die Region im Westen des Landes, schlug Widerstand gewaltsam nieder – und errichtete ein Lagersystem. (The Xinjiang Police Files focus on one of the greatest human rights violations of our time: China's leadership ruthlessly opened up the region in the west of the country, suppressed the resistance with violence – and established a camp system.)*

**Content:** The news has an impressive headline and positions China as a subject that builds a modern Gulag (forced labor camps in the Soviet Union), a concentration camp for Muslims. Spot defines the problems faced by minorities in Xinjiang as the biggest human rights problems of our time and treats China as a „ruthless” actor who violently suppresses the resistance of the Uyghur people. However, there is no information about the Gulag in the content of the news, and the reader is not informed that it is a forced labor camp. At the beginning of the news, information is given about the history and demographic structure of the autonomous region of Xinjiang. In the news, China's historical policies to reduce the population of Uyghurs and make them a minority in the region were mentioned. How the Uyghurs were marginalized in their homeland for many years has not been on the agenda of the world for a long time, and the Chinese state has opened the rich and fertile regions to the Chinese first with its military, then settlement and economic policies. In the news, the Urumqi events of 2009 and how it was violently suppressed by the state were discussed.

Some of the attempts to reduce the population of Uyghurs appear in the form of detaining Uyghur citizens, imprisoning them in education camps, separating parents from their children, forcing labor for men, and sterilizing women against their will.

**Actors:** The only actor mentioned in the news is China. The Chinese government accused the Uyghurs of „terrorist, separatist, and religious fundamentalism”

<sup>82</sup> B. Zand, *Unterdrückung in China: Wie China einen Gulag für Muslime errichtete* [24 V 2022], <https://www.spiegel.de/ausland/xinjiang-police-files-wie-china-einen-gulag-fuer-muslime-errichtete-a-d708f9b1-52a7-4221-b9c2-816e48e887ff> (4 IX 2022).

<sup>83</sup> The headline of the news is translated by the author.

(three evils), who also received support from Uyghur organizations abroad, in the clashes that broke out in the capital Urumqi in 2009. While initially ignoring the data on the systematic education camp design that Zenz shared, the Chinese government presented the detentions as a „major vocational training and career campaign”.

**Representation:** The re-education camps in China are described in the news as the modern Gulag of the 21st century. While reporting the relevant camps in China, references are made to the concentration camps known as the Gulag, which refers to the totalitarian nature of the Soviet Union.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** The news is based on research data from the German anthropologist and Tibet researcher Zenz. Der Spiegel appeals to a discourse claiming that the Chinese government has no professional and career policy in the autonomous region of Xinjiang and that there is no fight against terrorism, on the contrary, a policy of oppression is applied to the Uyghurs who have been converted into an ethnic and religious minority.

## News 2:

**The Headline of the news:** „Wie China Uiguren unterdrückt: „Erst Lager dann Zwangsarbeit”<sup>84</sup> (How China oppresses Uyghurs: „First camps then forced labour”<sup>85</sup>)

**Date:** 30 VII 2019

**News spot:** *Chinas Regierung will fast alle Insassen aus umstrittenen Lagern in der Provinz Xinjiang entlassen haben. Doch viele Betroffene bleiben offenbar unfrei – als Zwangsarbeiter*<sup>86</sup>. (China’s government wants to have released almost all inmates from controversial camps in Xinjiang province. But many of those affected apparently remain unfree – as forced laborers<sup>87</sup>.)

**Content:** In the title of the news, the pressure of China on the Uyghurs and the forced labor of the Uyghurs after they were evacuated from the camps are discussed. Spot, on the other hand, refers to the Chinese government’s statement that almost everyone living in the camps will be evacuated, but emphasizes that most of them will not be freed because they will be forced to work. The first lines of the news are based on the BBC’s news, the link of which will be given below (in the representation section). The Chinese government organized tours in 2019

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<sup>84</sup> V. Steinmetz, *Wie China Uiguren unterdrückt: Erst Lager, dann Zwangsarbeit* [30 VII 2019], <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/china-unterdrueckt-uiguren-erst-lager-dann-zwang-sarbeit-a-1279620.html> (4 IX 2022).

<sup>85</sup> The headline of the news is translated by the author.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>87</sup> The spot of the news is translated by the author.

to show journalists and foreign officials that all is well at the vocational training camps in the Xinjiang autonomous region. On these tours, images of people getting a haircut, dancing, and singing were recorded.

The news included the statements of XUAR chairman Zakir. He argues that after leaving the camps, people found well-paying jobs and were „reintegrated into society”. Expert opinion is also included in the article. Adrian Zenz, working at the Xinjiang Camp, described being sent to „education camps” as a kind of „extrajudicial detention”. The Chinese Government planned to send people from the camps to various types of work in 2018, which was defined as forced labor by the researcher. According to research by the Associated Press, people were forced to sign employment contracts in factories ranging from 6 months to 5 years.

**Actors:** Actors mentioned in the news are detainees in the camp, local government officials, human rights organizations, and countries that support and criticize policies toward Uyghurs. In the BBC news cited, Uyghur Muslim minorities stated that they were voluntarily in „vocational training camps” where high-security measures were taken to „dissuade them from terrorist ideas”.

In the reports of human rights organizations, former detainees stated that they were sworn in by the communist party and that some of them were subjected to physical and psychological violence. While some countries expressed that China should put an end to the persecution of Uyghurs, the Chinese government stated that the measures were within the scope of the „fight against terrorism”. On the other hand, autocratic states such as North Korea, Syria, and Iran have issued statements praising the camps in China.

**Representation:** The first sentence of the article refers to the following news from the BBC: „Searching for truth in China’s Uyghur ‘re-education’ camps”<sup>88</sup>. In the news, there are statements and photographs showing that everything is fine in daily life and that people are happy, by showing people who cut their hair, sing, and dance in the Xinjiang camps opened to journalists. In this news, camps are seen at first glance as places where people „affected by extreme thoughts” are rendered harmless, rehabilitated, and thus reintegrated into society. However, when the video in the news is evaluated together with the responses of the officials to the visitors and the constant monitoring of the visitors, it would not be correct to consider the camps as rehabilitation centers. It is noteworthy that the Chinese government has made some changes in the camp area to manipulate the impressions and thoughts of the visitors<sup>89</sup>.

<sup>88</sup> J. Sudworth, *Searching for Truth in China’s Uighur ‘Re-Education’ Camps* [21 VI 2019], <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-china-blog-48700786> (4 IX 2022).

<sup>89</sup> In the action-comedy film „The Interview” (2014), directed by Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, the journalist visiting North Korea is shown a market on the corner and a fat boy standing in front of him (36:50-37:31). Later in the movie, the actor realizes that the same market is not real, that everything he sees in the market is actually fake (1:11:25-1:13:05).

In Der Spiegel's report, re-education camps are portrayed as places where detainees receive vocational training before being forced into labor. This situation shows that although internment camps cannot be defined as vocational training camps on their own, but this is one dimension.

**With what rhetoric does the Western media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Chinese media, etc.?** Der Spiegel aims to influence the world public opinion with the discourse of „forced labor”. The headline of the news emphasizes that the Uyghurs and the Muslim minority are actually free neither in the camps nor out of the camps. Because after the camp, they have to work forcibly.

#### 4. People's Daily Online and Representation of Camps

##### News 1:

**The Headline of the news:** „Vocational training center graduates tell personal stories, refute ‘genocide’ accusations”<sup>90</sup>

**Date:** 14 VI 2021

**News spot:** There is no spot.

**Content:** It is noteworthy that the newspaper used personal stories while rejecting the accusations of genocide in its headline. The newspaper followed a similar strategy to Western media and gave place to the first-hand accounts. The people who were claimed to stay in the centers expressed that they were satisfied with the education they received. A photograph has been included in order to reinforce the content described in the news. In the photograph, a young woman working in a textile factory in Kashgar is dressed in a pink uniform and looks beautiful and well-groomed. In the background are other workers with a sewing machine in front of them. On the other hand, it is impossible to know whether these people expressed their own thoughts or those dictated by the public authorities. Defined as „former trainee” and „current graduate”, these people are often described as people from poor families, who have taken a sewing course, hair-dressing training, and have started their own business or have well-paid jobs. One even stated that she came to these centers at his mother's request. Asking whether she looked like a tortured person at the press conference, she flatly denied the allegation of torture and claimed that the western media was „deceiving” people. In the news, it is clear that the Chinese media interpreted every news of the Western media under the name of „political re-education camp”, „concentration camp” and „internment camp” as a distortion of vocational centers. According to the news, „all trainees” graduated at the end of 2019. It is hard to believe that all of

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<sup>90</sup> *Vocational Training Center Graduates Tell Personal Stories, Refute ‘Genocide’ Accusations* [14 VI 2021], <http://en.people.cn/n3/2021/0614/c90000-9860797.html> (4 IX 2022).

these people, described as „trainees” by People’s Daily Online, but described as „detainee” in western media sources, were evacuated from these camps. The analyzed news of CNN, BBC, and Der Spiegel between 2020-2022 do not prove this claim of Chinese media.

**Actors:** The actors mentioned in the news are the people who graduated from the so-called „vocational education and training centers”, the Chinese government, regional government spokesman, religious extremists, and the Uyghur Tribunal. It is noteworthy that „graduates” used similar sentences with the same meaning and spoke as if they had come out of one voice. At the press conference, they deny that the Chinese government committed genocide in XUAR, and say that they are freed from „extreme religious thoughts” thanks to the vocational education and training centers, and that they have better living conditions after graduation. One of them (Zulpiya Yasin) tells that she was influenced by „religious extremists” and they talked about „martyrdom” to impress her. According to her narratives, religious extremists told him that the state did not provide housing for Muslims and that they could not use the money given by the state. Thus, religious extremists have been indirectly represented in the news. The regional government spokesman condemned the „Uyghur Tribunal” and described it as „anti-China forces”, and evaluated its performance as „poor” based on the hearings and trials.

**Representation:** In the news, the expression „camp” was used only in one place as the discourse of the „west”. In the news, the camps described as political re-education camps and internment camps in the Western media are „vocational and educational training centers”. These centers function as places where „laws on counter-terrorism”, spoken and written Chinese, computer, and vocational skills have been taught to Uyghur Muslims, who have the potential to be affected by extremist thoughts. The centers are portrayed as important institutions for stability and security, based on a legal basis, that „remove the ground that breeds terrorism and religious extremism”. They are considered as institutions that contribute to the development of society.

**With what rhetoric does the Chinese media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Western media, etc.?** People’s Daily Online tries to make their discourses believable by referring to the accounts of three women who had previously trained in these centers, about the opportunities provided to them, and how their living conditions improved after the „vocational education”. It is seen that both these „graduates” and the newspaper itself denied crimes such as „genocide” attributed to China. The newspaper also describes the news of the western media about torture and rape in the camps as „accusation” and „fabrication” and aims to discredit these media organs. The Chinese media tries to influence opinions by using educational concepts and describing those living in these so-called „centers” as „trainee” and those leaving there as „graduates”.



## News 2:

**The Headline of the news:** „Western data on Uyghurs has serious flaws”<sup>91</sup>

**Date:** 30 XII 2019

**News spot:** *Estimated figures wrongly attributed to UN report, derived from dubious studies*<sup>92</sup>.

**Content:** In the title of the news, the Western media is criticized for having serious flaws, and it is stated in the spotlight that the figures presented to the United Nations are collected from „suspicious studies”. The Chinese media generally resent the unquestioned acceptance of the claim that Uyghurs have been arrested in the West. The data collection methods and sources of CHRD are found to be problematic. One of the main points of criticism is that CHRD’s data are based on interviews with a small number of people. The news includes that the US and Western media see China as a „violator of human rights”.

The news image includes a photo of two Uyghur women holding the PRC flag, one posing with a serious-looking pose and the other smiling slightly.

**Actors:** The news featured a wide variety of actors. These are the Chinese government, The Grayzone, Network of Chinese Human Rights Defenders (CHRD), United Nations, the US Government, and western media. In the newspaper, the claim that millions of Uyghurs were detained is tried to be disproved by referring to the news of The Grayzone newspaper. It is claimed that the Western media is based on the discourses of CHRD, which is generally supported by the USA. While it has been claimed that the data provided by CHRD were not reliable, it has been stated that they were also presented to the United Nations and misinterpreted as written by the UN in the western media.

**Representation:** In the news, the camps have been described as „vocation-al education and training centers” established as „part of regional measures” to „fight against terrorism and extremism”.

**With what rhetoric does the Chinese media try to influence the opinion of the world, the Western media, etc.?** People’s Daily Online aims to prove that the data on the Uyghurs on which the Western media and the U.S. government are based are seriously „flawed” and to influence the public by arguing that the Western media has not adequately scrutinized the „claims” regarding the detention of Uyghurs.

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<sup>91</sup> *Western Data on Uyghurs Has Serious Flaws* [20 XII 2019], <http://en.people.cn/n3/2019/1230/c90000-9644591.html> (5 IX 2022).

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*.

## Conclusion

The pressure and intimidation policies of the People's Republic of China on the Uyghurs increased even more through the methods such as re-education camps established in the second half of the 2010s and forced labor. High-tech securitization policies and security expenditures give important clues about how China monitors and controls its Muslim minorities. In this study, the critical discourse analysis method which enables the analysis of social issues such as discrimination, identities, power, and control through the language practices of the actors has been applied. It is analyzed how the camps are represented in the selected western and Chinese media and how domination and surveillance appear in the daily lives of ordinary individuals in the camps.

First-hand accounts of Uyghur women were included in the first BBC news, and reliable data were tried to be revealed by comparing the obtained information with other data. In the second BBC news and the first CNN news, the pressure and surveillance system were mentioned over the leaked official documents of the Chinese government. In the BBC news, the camps were described as high-security prison camps, as places where women's bodies are exposed to violations of the right to health, torture, gang rape, and their thoughts are exposed to political indoctrination. The conclusion reached by the BBC with both news is that the Chinese government aims to destroy the Uyghur identity. In CNN news, the camps are discussed as part of the government's repressive policies and campaigns, portrayed as places where people who do not commit crimes, have ordinary behavior, are held and ideologically educated, and are forced to confess because of previous non-criminal behavior such as cultural and religious practices. CNN talks about the „far-reaching surveillance system” and explains that all extended family members are watched. In the BBC and CNN media, camps are areas where people are forcibly detained and completely watched, and subjected to political indoctrination. „Surveillance” is the most emphasized topic in both media.

One of the most impressive statements about the camps in Xinjiang was in Der Spiegel news where these camps are described as the „modern Gulag of the 21st century”. This newspaper portrays the camps as areas where people worked forcibly and claims that after the training they received in the camps, people were forced to work in factories. In a BBC report cited by Spiegel, China's camps were presented to visitors as „rehabilitation centers” and the news actually referred to the camps as places where Uyghurs and other minorities received vocational training before forced labor. The common emphasis in the Western media is that the camps target the culture and beliefs of Muslim Uyghurs rather than fighting terrorism and extremism. Another emphasis is that due to surveillance, Muslim minorities are free neither in the camps nor out of the camps. Although there is no significant difference in the discourses of the Western media about the camps

in China, it is noteworthy that the discourses of CNN and BBC are more similar to each other. According to selected western media, the camps are an important part of the policy of oppression and surveillance. Unlike CNN and BBC, Der Spiegel portrays the camps in China as structures similar to the Gulag in the Soviet Union. In the discourse of this newspaper, the camps are interpreted as places where Uyghurs received education before they were forced to work.

People's Daily Online firmly denies that there are „political re-education camps” in Xinjiang and allegations that millions of Uyghurs are detained in them, while claims that these places are „vocational and educational training centers”. While talking about these „centers” the Chinese media tries to influence international public opinion by using educational concepts such as „trainees” and „graduates”. It defines these institutions as places that enable social development, where trainees get rid of extremist thoughts, study anti-terrorism laws, Chinese, and learn some professional skills. According to the Chinese media, these institutions do not only provide stability and security in society but also contribute to development. In fact, the Chinese media does not deny that these „centers” have a political education dimension, but it is noteworthy that they avoid a camp discourse that would legitimize the allegations about political indoctrination and human rights violations.

It is noteworthy that the Chinese government did not respond to the allegations about the camps in the Western media, and government officials mentioned the issue during their visits to different countries. While Western news sources deal with the camps, they include the opinions of human rights organizations, expert opinions, first-hand accounts, and opinions of Uyghur and other non-Han exiles. It is remarkable that some of these sources also make comprehensive reports similar to a research report. The Chinese media also includes various actors in their news and try to discredit the Western media and the US government by claiming that their news is usually „fabrication” or based on „questionable studies”.

## Abstrakt

Ayşe Çiçek

### **„Polityczne obozy reedukacyjne” w Xinjiangu jako element społeczeństwa panoptykonowego. Ścierające się dyskursy zachodnich i chińskich mediów**

W XXI w. możemy zauważyć zbrodnie przeciwko ludzkości w Regionie Autonomicznym Sinkiang-Ujgur, znajdujący się w granicach Chin. Naruszenia praw człowieka doświadczane przez żyjących od stuleci w tym regionie Ujgurów nie stanowią

żadnej nowości. Stosunek państwa do Ujgurów ewoluował w nowy wymiar wraz z powstaniem obozów, które władze określają jako ośrodki szkolenia zawodowego, a w literaturze znane są również jako obozy reedukacji politycznej czy też internowania. Będące częścią polityki bezpieczeństwa państwa obozy stały się nieuchronnie przedmiotem szeregu badań, zwłaszcza w kontekście łamania praw człowieka. W niniejszym artykule, korzystając z metody krytycznej analizy dyskursu, poszukiwana jest odpowiedź na pytanie, w jaki sposób obozy reedukacji politycznej, w przeciwieństwie do innych, są ukazywane w wybranych mediach zachodnich i chińskich. Analiza wykazała, że obozy stanowią część społeczeństwa skonstruowanego na wzór Panoptikonu, w którym życie Ujgurów jest monitorowane pod każdym kątem, gdzie doświadczano zarówno łamania praw, jak i indotryncji politycznej. Jednakże chińskie media przedstawiają je jako miejsca, dzięki którym życie mniejszości staje się bezpieczniejsze, stabilniejsze i nastawione na rozwój.

**Słowa kluczowe:** obozy reedukacyjne, obozy internowania, Chiny, Ujgurzy, sekurytyzacja, relacje władzy, krytyczna analiza dyskursu

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**Ayşe Çiçek** – dr politologii i stosunków międzynarodowych, wykładowca w Vocational School of Social Sciences w Istanbul Medipol University. ORCID: 0000-0001-6303-4468