

[Transcript] Leading / Rahima Mahmut: The Uyghur Genocide

Hello, and welcome to another episode of the Restless Politics Leading, the new channel of interviews that Rory Stewards and I do, and our guest today is perhaps the least well known of our interviewees so far, but far from the least interesting, definitely amongst the most courageous and certainly a leader.

She's the leader in a fight and I'm now quoting the name of her campaign, Stop Wiga Genocide, and she's the UK director of the World Wiga Congress.

She's also amazingly a singer, a writer, an artist, a photographer, an award-winning interpreter, and she's a former chemistry teacher.

She's been living in exile in London with her son since the year 2000, and she's never been back to her native, what she calls, East Turkestan.

I met her at a recent Holocaust memorial event hosted by the Anne Frank Trust in a small group of people which contained a Holocaust survivor, the descendant of a Holocaust survivor, and a recent victim of anti-Semitic violence who were lighting candles together.

And she was there as a reminder that genocide remains a threat and for some a reality.

To that day, we got talking and I felt that our listeners would like to share in that conversation, so I asked her to come on the podcast.

So if I pronounce this well, tell me so, if I pronounce it badly, tell me.

Rahima Mahmood, welcome.

Thank you.

Thank you for having me.

It's Nana.

Now, Rahima, most of our listeners will have heard of the struggle of Wiga Muslims, but just to start, who are the Uighurs, how many Uighurs are there, where are they, what are their beliefs and values, and what is the genocide of which you were speaking at the Anne Frank Trust?

So we Uyghurs, we are Turkic people, so we speak Uyghur language, which is almost same as the Uzbek language, and the only difference is the kind of dialect.

So the root we call a lot of Turks call us Uyghur Turks, and we believe in Islam as we are Muslim.

And East Turkistan, or the Chinese government official title, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and Xinjiang means the new frontier or the new territory, although the Chinese government claim that the Xinjiang is historically as a part of China, but the name itself gives it away.

New Frontier.

New Frontier.

And so the Uyghurs are very different from the Uyghur that we would look, and also because of our very different cultural traditions, of course the language and the belief as Muslims.

So the so-called Xinjiang is geographically is in the heart of Central Asia.

So the reason we call it East Turkistan, although it also has the political meaning, but also the geographically is that you have this vast Turkistan, the land of the Turks.

So the Western Turkistan and where we are is the east of the land of Turkic people.

And if you look at it on the map, it's a big place.

Your borders are Mongolia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Pakistan, all border a certain part of Xinjiang East Turkistan.

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So it's a big place.

How many people define themselves, identify as Uyghurs?

Well, according to the Chinese official census, it's approximately 12 million.

12 million.

Let's say that the Uyghurs are 12 million.

But we Uyghur people, we believe we are about 20 to 25, because historically, especially since the occupation by the CCP Chinese government, they hide certain facts in order to make us to look very minority.

And what is the thinking behind what you call the genocide against you?

What are they trying to do with you?

Completely wipe out the identity, not necessarily physically wipe out the whole entire Uyghur people, but the identity, the language, the religion and everything that means or reflects who we are as Uyghurs.

And to try to put yourself in their mind, I know that must be difficult, but when they're sitting there thinking, we need to do this, why are they thinking that?

Well, I mean, in my mind, it's very difficult to understand.

But I can, like you said, I can think from their point of view, it's paranoia.

It's that the Chinese government, including the people, never felt home.

Because in 1949, when Chinese Communist Party invaded or took over, four to five percent population were Chinese.

The rest were the Uyghur and other Turkic groups like Uzbeks, Tatars, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Huey, Muslim also.

And now when we look at it, it's about in the cities, some cities, they are more than 50 percent and they are in control of all the wealth, petrol, gold, all the mines.

We say black and white, gold, white is a cotton, cotton, 84 percent, China's cotton comes from the region.

And then you have coal, where I come from is a very known, well known for its coal, many different minerals and jade, you name it.

So of course, as any kind of colonizers, they, you know, the wealth is extremely important.

But this paranoia, that feeling not at home, feeling that the Uyghurs always resented.

And they feel that they are not the owner of that land.

And in order to completely feel safe, so then you convert everyone to be, to think like them.

And these, what do we call them, do they call them reeducation camps?

I don't know what you call them, but you've got, how many people are in these camps where they're being essentially detained and reeducated in quotes?

It's not reeducation.

But that's what they call it.

Yeah, that's what they call it.

It's torture camps, concentration camps.

I translated for many survivors who some taught in those camps were forced to teach in those camps and some were detained and we have two survivors living in this country.

And how many, how many people are there?

Give us a sense of the scale.

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Well, it's hard to know, but we believe up to three million, up to three million.

But from the UN report, that first time they reported in August 2018, it said up to one million in reeducation camps.

But we believe the numbers are far, far higher.

So you left in 2000, and if I remember this rightly, essentially you were studying and you got the opportunity to do a master's degree at the University of Central Lancashire.

Did you ever go and see a Burnley Football Club play?

Sorry.

Why not?

Why not?

Well, you know, I had to complete the master's degree in a year and English is my second language.

So football is not only a gender fair, it will next, when you go back, I'll take you to a Burnley game.

I would love this.

I would love to.

So, and you came and before you left, you decided actually you were going to use this opportunity essentially to escape.

Yes.

I was teaching, I graduated from a petrochemical background, Dalian University of Technology.

In fact, I was in Tiamen in 1989 as well.

So my activism didn't just start after I came here.

Yeah, sure.

I was one of the students in Tiamen.

So the discrimination is so systematic there.

I worked at the petrol industry for four years.

In the end, I had to live.

I cannot cope and I became a lecturer at a college.

And then after 1997, February 5th, Golja, Massika, that's where I am from.

I was visiting my family during the school holiday with my son, who was only a year and a half at that time.

So this peaceful protest met with Chinese CCP violence, killing over 100.

And then this terror started from that night, door-to-door raid and take away young men.

So that really made me to make this decision.

But you came without your son?

It wasn't possible to obtain a visa, the immigration, one of the criteria for you to get a visa, whether you're going to go back or you're going to stay.

So that is a very hard decision.

So how long were you here without your son and your husband?

Two years, two years.

And then they applied for a visa in 2001, it was refused.

Then in 2002, when they applied to come to attend my graduation ceremony, that was approved.

And that's how we reunited.

And do you have, you may not know the answer to this, but do you have family in some of these camps?

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I don't have any answers to this.

You might know from my story, the last time I spoke to my eldest brother, after two months I cannot get hold of them was January the 3rd, 2017.

It's very difficult to even find out any information.

Tell me about that conversation though.

It must have meant a lot because you remember the day, I don't remember the date of many conversations in my life.

So what was so significant about that conversation?

Yes, from August 2016, no one would answer my phone calls.

People removed me from V-Chat, we had a V-Chat family group, friend groups.

For two months I cannot get hold of anyone and I thought maybe the new year normally, you know, we send messages and I wasn't, there's no news.

In the end, on the 3rd of January, I called my eldest brother.

His landline didn't stop for almost two hours.

I thought, someone has to answer my call, I need to know what happened.

Because I heard a lot of rumors at the time that implemented some really very tough policies and the people are disappearing from people who are still communicating with their families.

And then after this 20, 30, maybe 50 phone call, my brother answered, and he said, why?

Because as Muslim and my father is a very religious man, so we, from very young age, when we greet anyone, even when we speak over on the phone, is the first thing we say, As-Salaam-Alaikum, is in a Muslim way of greeting.

So I heard that that word, As-Salaam-Alaikum was banned, I didn't believe.

I thought, it can't be.

You know, this is such a common, like, it's just when you call Hawaii, it's for us, it's like Hawaii.

Then I said, why no one is answering my call, brother?

He said, they did the right thing, please leave us in God's hands.

We leave you in God's hand too, and he put the phone down.

So I can hear the fear, the fear from my brother's voice, and from what I remember, all my brothers were like fearless, very dignified, and that's how my father was as well.

But I can understand the threat.

You might have been warned by the police that if you ever, you know, answer the call, or if you call her, then you will be taken to the camps.

And I think maybe that wasn't...

So you don't even know where they are, or whether they're alive or dead?

No, the safest way for me, I mean, for them to be safe is for me not to contact them.

So how does, I mean, how do you deal with that?

How do you deal with that emotionally?

How does your son deal with that?

Well...

You know, separated from your husband, yeah?

Yes.

So you and your son live here?

Yeah, just me and my son.

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Well, first six months was very difficult, you know.
One day I was crying in the kitchen while cooking, and my son walked in and saw me.
I normally don't show my emotion too much, because I don't want to burden him.
So he came to me, and he just hugged me tightly, and he said, Mom, please be strong.
We will fight back.
We will be strong.
Things will not, shouldn't be like this all the time.
It will change.
He's in his twenties now, yeah?
Yes.
And he was never interested in this, you know, my activism, although he is very interested in promoting our culture, language, and so he set up his now network called the Tardem Network.
That gave me kind of hope.
It just kind of lifted me off this burden and this sadness.
So my focus was more on what to do, rather than, you know, just dwell on to this kind of sadness.
And after a while you get used to it, because we also have a saying, said, you will get used to hell after seven days.
Pretty bleak message, isn't it?
Yes.
So I also, a cancer survivor, you know, I had a grade three cancer in 2013.
I remember the first week I had panic attack when I was told that cancer might have spread.
But then after I learned that it wasn't spread, I was very happy and I felt like I accepted.
After I accepted, everything become very easy.
How was the NHS for you?
Was good.
Good.
I was very, very lucky.
And I think they do look after cancer patients very gently and, you know, I mean, if I were in China, you know, many people cannot afford chemotherapy, it's just far too expensive.
And you're a very, very talented musician, and I've spent much of the weekend listening to a lot of your music and some of your favorite songs by others.
And I think this is not an audition to present Desire Island Discs for the BBC.
I think Match of the Day is more my mechie.
But I think we're going to play two or three of your songs through the interview.
And I think given what you've just talked about, we should play the one that's called My Son, which is about separation.
Yeah.
Tell us a little bit about what this song's about and tell us a little bit more generally about your culture and why you see culture as being the thing that you have to protect and fight for.
So to me, for one to be happy, a food and shelter is not enough.
We need another type of sustenance.

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Something that satisfies your soul.

And for me, as Uyghur, my soul cannot be satisfied if I'm not allowed to speak my language, if I'm not allowed to sing the songs that I grow up with.

The Han Chinese are trying to stop your singing, your writing, your art, they're trying to erase that.

Everything is censored.

It has to be their way, what you call Chinese characteristics.

It has to be even religion.

So now we know that even the nurseries, primary schools, banned the Uyghur language.

So I can name hundreds of writers that I used to admire, I still admire, of course I admire.

They're all in prison.

They're poets, writers, they're all serving 16, 20 years in prison, professors from universities who resisted when the announcement came that they are not allowed to teach in Uyghur.

And that all the Uyghur language class has to be stopped.

So that is the reason why I think you can imagine you, someone suddenly, you know, force you to speak a different language after invaded your country, how would you feel?

Tell us about this, this first song that we're going to hear then, it's called My Son.

So it's called My Dear Son, When Will You Return?

So when I read this poem by Muhammad Abdul-Majid, an exiled poet who lives in Turkey, who didn't speak to his mother for many years, just like me.

Because of being in exile?

Not only just being in exile, because that is also banned.

For any families, have relatives, even sons or daughters abroad, regardless whether they are activists or involved in anything, they just banned them from speaking from 2016.

Because why? They didn't want all this news about the camps and all that to spread to the exile world.

So under the content itself, really, really touched my heart.

I felt this as a mother.

So you've turned this into a song?

Yes.

I just thought about, you know, if my mother was alive, you know, for so many years, not being able to speak to me, I felt fortunate that my mother died before all this happened.

So at least during that time, I was able to call her.

We kept a very close relationship until she died.

So that is the kind of feelings and reasons behind me for composing this song.

And I thought also, you know, through art, through music, through songs that you can reach more people.

You said this, I saw this on your website, for me, music is a site of resistance, a vehicle through which I can share our experience, our pain, but also our joy.

When the regime does it all it can to break us, expressing joy is a true act of defiance, which I just absolutely love.

So let's listen to your first choice.

When we were preparing to do this interview and you sent it to me, I said, OK, well, that's all very well, but I speak French, I speak German, I don't speak Uyghur.

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What does it mean?

And as you're a brilliant translator and you've won awards for it, you sent me this.

My eyes are weary from looking out for you.

My hands are sore from praying for your return.

My heart bleeds from being torn apart.

My dear son, when will you return?

Every day I wait on the road yearning for your appearance all day long.

The nights are sleepless until dawn breaks.

My dear son, when will you return?

When will you return?

Without you by my side, I'm alone.

My food can pass my lips, my throat is too dry.

I worry if you've eaten or not.

My dear son, when will you return?

My dear son, when will you return?

That is so sad.

We're going to come back with more talk and a bit more music after the break.

Now when we were talking about doing this podcast and you were telling me how nervous you were, and I was asking for more and more examples of your culture.

And you sent me a poem, which I'm going to read out, and you told me the story that it was written by somebody called Gul Nisa Imin, who is in prison, like some of these other artists that we talked about, serving 17 years because her writing offended the Chinese.

And it was smuggled out, handwritten by her, smuggled out of her prison and found its way here and has been translated.

So I'll read it out.

It's a very similar theme to the separation song as well, isn't it, my son?

When you think of me, shed no tears of grief.

You must not fade away for those who've gone.

If now and then you find me in your dreams.

You must not look with longing down the road.

Some things in life remain beyond our reach.

Hold no anger in your heart on my account.

Ask no news of me from people that you meet.

Your thoughts of me must not weigh on your soul.

Just think of me as someone on a journey.

If I'm alive, one day I shall return.

I won't give up on happiness so easily.

There is much more that I still ask of life.

Both of my stars have now been left among you.

Please cherish them for me while I am gone, with the kindness that raised me up from childhood.

Let them live within your sheltering embrace.

She has children, yeah?

Yeah.

So the two stars are her children.

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Oh my God.

Oh my God.

I read out on the podcast recently, we were talking about grief.

So when she says, when you think of me, shed no tears of grief, you must not fade away for those who've gone.

If now and then you find me in your dreams.

And I read out a poem that my mother left us on her deathbed.

She said, farewell my family, my life is past, I loved you all to the very last.

Weep not for me, but courage take, love each other for my sake.

For those you love don't go away, they walk beside you every day.

Yeah.

I mean, imagine someone in prison being tortured and they're leaving hell.

Able to write that.

Able to write that.

Hold no anger.

But that's where your point, when the regime does all it can to break as expressing joy is a true act of defiance.

Yeah.

That's what she's been.

When you find the strength to be happy, it's not easy.

It's easy to be angry.

So you've called Xinjiang, East Turkestan, you've called it a police state.

And when you was phoning your brother, what was, do you imagine, was going through?

Was he thinking they're listening, they're watching?

What was he thinking?

Was he thinking they can recognize your voice?

What's going on?

He knows that they were listening.

That's why he cannot say more than what he said.

Otherwise, he would have asked, how are you, how are you doing as always, because after I had cancer, if I didn't call him within a week, he used to complain and say, we worry about you, you should call us more often.

And I also know that they listened well before these camps and also they established the police state from 2009 after the Urumqi massacre.

Because I read some of their own documents and said, no blind spot.

The cameras installed everywhere and we know the checkpoints set up, especially after 2014 since 2013, she took power.

So we all were very aware.

That's why when we spoke over the phone, we were very careful.

And there are three countries, I think, three major countries, the United States, Canada and the Netherlands, who've all called this out as genocide, but the British government hasn't.

So far, the only government that called it genocide is U.S. and the Parliament's Canadian Parliament is the first Parliament that declared as genocide.

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The government's still not.

And Holland as well, including this country, the Parliament, passed the...

So what's the position with the UK government?

The government is not accepting, this is genocide, they say court has to decide.

But we don't have court to go to, one China has a veto power, another is not a member.

And even though the independent Uyghur tribe led by Sir Jeffrey Nice declared this genocide based on the sheer number of women being forcefully sterilized and forced abortion, however, the government's reluctant to call it genocide.

And how do you feel generally about the political support that you get around the world?

Do you think China is so big and so powerful that these governments are just finding it very, very difficult to do what you would consider to be the right thing?

It's very frustrating, it's extremely, extremely frustrating.

And I know we are facing the one of the biggest power and especially because of the economic power over many different countries.

But I thought at least the UK and countries like Canada and the European countries would put human rights above the economic benefits, interests.

But the reality is the genocide is happening since 2017.

There are undeniable proof, evidence, satellite image of the camps, drone footage that many people might have seen.

And Ruma show when he interviewed the Chinese ambassador and showed that clip, drone footage of blind folding.

We'll send that to our listeners as well.

And plus the leaked documents, 400 pages leaked documents.

Then last year, the police file of the faces, almost 3,000 detainees, the faces of youngest 15-year-old and the oldest was 72.

You can just see the horror on the faces.

Even for the UN to release its report, we had to wait month after month.

And the Michelle Bachelet released her report four minutes before her term ended.

Four minutes before her term ended.

She just wasn't able to release that report, called it, may conclude, crimes against humanity. Didn't dare to call it genocide.

They diluted a lot of information regarding the forced abortion and forced sterilization part in order not to call it genocide.

And do you imagine that, I thought the Dutch government had, but it's the parliament you're saying.

The government having done that, called out as genocide.

Do you think that is about a genuine concern for you and your people, or is that actually just to have a go at China within their bigger geo-strategic battle that's going on?

When did they do that?

When did the US government do that?

Well, the Trump administration called it genocide.

Pompey was very, very outspoken.

He met several survivors.

They heard directly from them about what is happening, including a gang rape victim.

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And I do believe, I would like to believe, that the decision was made based on the evidence and all the, because there are so many leaked documents and experts like Dr. Adrian Zenz who's based in US, produced the most professional reports based on the Chinese own documents, own open sources.

And I would like to believe in that.

Of course, you know, there are political situation, but I'm not a politician, I'm not going to go into that.

So to be fair, then the Trump administration, you would say, did the right thing?

Of course.

It is the right thing.

And you'd like other governments to do the same?

I just thought that in my mind is like, because US is far more powerful than many, many other countries, maybe they feel that they are confident that they can confront, they can say it, they can call it.

But I thought with the US leading, then other countries would follow as well.

And after the parliament voted, and I thought that the UK government will also call it genocide, but they didn't.

Do you feel scared here?

I mean, because, you know, we had that incident not long ago, it was in Manchester where Chinese officials were pretty violent against people who were protesting.

And I mean, do you, as you were going about by yourself, do you feel scared here?

No, I'm not scared I'm concerned.

I'm kind of fearless person.

I kind of get that feeling.

If I am scared, I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing.

I just overcome that long, long time ago.

When you were talking earlier about China seeing East Turkestan, as you refer to it as their territory and always has been, I couldn't help thinking about, think of Ukraine and Russia and, you know, on the streets of London and Salisbury and, you know, we've had, we've had state assassinations take place and, you know, China's a very, very authoritarian regime and they, does that not fill you with fear that you're possibly a target?

Yeah, similar things happened to Uyghurs in Kazakhstan, in Central Asian countries, neighboring countries so far, not in Europe or America.

So one thing that I do believe, although China is brutal, but they also, a country that care about its face.

So they care more about people not knowing about what they do, rather than doing it in places where it would quickly become known.

That has been the case, but we don't know, you know, what happened next because the regime is becoming more aggressive.

And what do you say to their claims that the reason they've had to take such firm action against the Uyghurs is that lots of them joined ISIS, that you had an attack on a railway that led to 31 people being killed, that you had an incident with a car in Tiananmen Square where somebody else was killed, that they're saying this is necessary to deal with a threat from an Islamic threat.

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There's no Islamic threat in my view.

It's a bunch of people just become so desperate.

There are people in this country, in America as well, you develop mental problem after, you know, either because of your certain personal problems or in my country, especially from 1989, during the 80s, and then, you know, after I left, the regime, the way of life, the Uyghurs just, it's not life.

You're saying that some of those people might be easy pickings from an organization like ISIS.

Exactly.

Why Uyghur people go to ISIS because you're not fighting the Chinese?

It just, it doesn't make sense whatsoever.

The traffickers benefited from these people because they're so desperate to get out.

They came to Turkey, then without knowing they were transferred to the hand of ISIS.

I know one example, if you allow me, I would like to share this.

This poet, Abdrehm Paraj, who is one of the top poets in, you know, living in exile in Turkey, and I have huge respect for him, his story is absolutely heartbreaking.

So he served three years in prison because he celebrated the life of Abdrehm Uyghur, one of the most prominent and well-known poets of our time when he was studying in Kashgar University literature.

And it was on the eve of the Hong Kong was taken back, you know, the return of Hong Kong to the CCP.

How is that?

Apparently, it was because it's a sensitive time.

Normally when there is, when they call it a sensitive time, they arrest a lot of people.

So he was arrested and then they confiscated his poems in Kashgar at that time in 97.

So after serving three years prison, then he got married, he had children, but life wasn't a life for him over there because of the censorship.

So he left illegally with his eldest son, who was 11 or 12 years old, trafficked, just paying a lot of money to the trafficker.

So they were in Malaysia for almost a year, waiting to be, you know, taken to Turkey to transfer to Turkey.

I met quite a lot of Uyghurs waiting for the same, you know, transfer by these traffickers.

And one day the trafficker said, we have a plane, we can put several people to that, but we cannot, you know, have you and your son, one of you have to go first.

So Abdraym thought it's better for his son to go because he befriended several people during the time when they lived in Malaysia illegally.

So he told the guy that please look after my son until I arrive.

So he followed one month later.

So he said, before he left Malaysia, he spoke to his son, and when he arrived, he cannot get hold of him.

Then a week later, he learned his son was in Syria.

And then when he reached 14, I think it was Christmas time, he received a message from the ISIS that his son is now going to carry out the suicide mission, he's dead.

Three Uyghur children I know happened.

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I don't believe any Uyghur went there voluntarily, it's the traffickers.

God knows how much money these people made for handing over a 13-year-old child to the hand of the ISIS.

So when he told me the story first time for many nights, I couldn't sleep, I was thinking about this child and also thinking about Abdrahim, who also lost contact with all his children.

And his wife, he know that imprisoned for 11 years for giving birth to too many children.

Let's talk about another Abdurrahim, Abdurrahim Hayat, who you sent me some of his music.

Tell us about this song that we're going to listen to, what's it called and what's it about?

Abdrahim is one of the most well-known composer, singer, and we call him a Dutar king.

Dutar is like a two-string guitar.

Dutar is two-string, two-string, a lute, yeah, Dutar, Dutar means two.

What does guitar mean?

No idea.

Dutar means string.

So Dutar is a two-string.

So Dutar is two.

Yeah, Dutar is a Persian.

And Dutar is a two-string.

So Abdrahim, we heard that he was arrested for singing this song called Atlar, Fathers.

The lyrics comes from, was by Yalqun Rose, is another very well-known cultural figure who actually helped create the children's books as well, school books.

And now he is serving, I think, about 20 years prison sentence for his writings and also defending the yogurt culture.

And Abdrahim is in prison as well?

Yes, we believe he is in prison.

So there is a story about Abdrahim.

So after he was arrested, because he's so well-known and especially really loved by the Turks, one of the songs called Kars-Lashkanda means When We Encounter and the lyrics by Abdrahim Utgur.

I mentioned that this man is one of the most prominent and beloved poets in Uyghur history.

So later there was a rumor about Abdrahim died in prison.

So the Turkey, the foreign office, first time condemned him with the strongest term of the Chinese government killing this poet and singer.

Then two days later, there was a video, the Chinese government produced a video clip.

And you can see on YouTube of this video, Abdrahim.

When you watch YouTube of his songs, he is very good-looking and is kind of very dignified, powerful, that kind of figure.

And most of the songs also is about Uyghur culture, the pride and the history, who are Uyghurs, those kind of lyrics that he composed into songs.

And he appeared on this video as a prisoner.

You can see his head was shaven. He's just a completely different man.

And he said, they are investigating me. They didn't torture me. I am okay.

But this just shows the brutality. You know, there is no bottom line.

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But it also shows that the Turks, you say you identify much more closely with Istanbul than Beijing. You feel more Turkish than Chinese.

Yes.

And it took that for the Turkish government to stand up and say something.

Do you not feel very unsupported by the Erdogan regime?

Well, of course, we feel very frustrated and sad, because Adokhan said in 2009, the July 5th massacre, he was the only leader in the world called the Chinese government committing genocide. He did?

Within one month, he had to apologize.

And then the Chinese government went after him to appease and to take the opportunity to give money, invest, because, you know, the Erdogan regime became distant from the U.S. after the coup and a lot of difficulties the country faced.

So, has he been silent about you since then?

He was forced to become silent in order to, I think, to receive all those funds.

And, you know, I condemn that, but compared to many other countries, including like the neighboring countries, Turkey still stood up for Uyghurs.

And we had so many large number of Uyghurs trapped in Turkey after, you know, atrocities started from 2016.

So they're living there, although we have several being returned, sadly, but we still consider Turkey as our hope, as our second home.

And so I don't want to go into too much.

And also, they are the biggest taker of refugees in the world.

Exactly.

They give credit to that humanity of the Turkish people.

This song, we come back to this song, Atlar is Fathers.

The lyrics says that people always praise about their mothers.

All the songs is about mothers.

There are fathers, you know, we have these fathers.

Stand up for fathers, girls, after him.

He's right.

The fathers who were the heroes, you know, who fought on the horseback, defended our land.

Exactly.

And, you know, they used the word jihad.

And jihad there, it doesn't mean nowadays jihad.

Jihad is always used, is a word that you fight against the invader, defend your land, your people and your religion.

But the Chinese government used that word, said that he is spreading the terrorist ideology.

And also, the Yalkunruzi who wrote the poem, is also the deemed problematic.

So that's why he's in jail?

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Not only just that one, but that's one of the reasons.
One of the many, many other reasons, other accusations
that the Chinese government made against him.
Let's listen to Abderim Hitt, putting the case for fathers.
Right, so that's Abderim Hitt, who is in jail, putting a bad word in a poem.
The power of China is absolutely extraordinary.
You spoke at COP26 in Glasgow, and I got the sense that you were worried
that there's a danger that the world might go soft on China's climate policies
as well because of their political power.
Oh, definitely.
They have been soft.
That amount of waste, pollution, it's just unbelievable.
I mean, I worked in the petrochemical industry.
I know that when I came to this country, I studied,
my master's degree is environmental waste management.
And when I look at the standard that this country set up
and the most western world, I mean that China is far from it.
The residential buildings and the distance from the petrochemical plants
that you can see from your balcony, this smoke that is in the air.
And one of the highest of my country has the highest cancer rates in China
because also the nuclear explosion, that's a base, a nuclear test base.
So this is another important issue that the world should really tackle.
It should really condemn China for it.
Now, on desert island discs, once they've asked me to present that
after I've done a match of the day, sports personality of the year
and a few other programs, maybe the BBC six o'clock news every now and then.
At the end of it, they always say, if you could only take one song with you.
Okay.
And I get the feeling from our exchanges over the weekend
that the next one might be yours and this is called Tarim.
Yes.
And it's your song.
You wrote this?
No, it's not my song.
It's a traditional folk song.
It's a contemporary folk song.
It's a contemporary folk song.
Yeah.
And do I detect a little bit of Scottish and Irish in there?
Yeah.
Yeah.
Yeah, I thought so.
I thought so.
I reckon it just needs a little bit of a bagpipe track.

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Yes.

Just going through there.

Maybe I can collaborate with someone like that.

Absolutely.

I'm sure I can find you the right person for that.

But just tell me about the song and tell me why it's your favorite.

So Tarim, the lyrics was written by someone who didn't dare to reveal the identity in the 60s when large number of young Uyghurs were taken to Tarim labour camp.

One of the most notorious camps in the desert near the Tarim River is the second largest desert in the world is Teclah Macan Desert, that those camps still exist.

Those prisoners still are forced to pick cotton in there.

So this was a song written about that tragedy that the person who was going to Tarim and it says, if you come to Tarim, I will adorn you with flowers.

And it's something that is impossible is in the middle of desert.

There's no, you know, there is no way, but it just kind of a message also shows the optimism that the Uyghurs always have.

And that's how we survive in the midst of the horror.

People still find way to be happy and to find hope.

So this Tarim, when you listen to the voice, it's very, very sad.

The melody is very sad, but also end with something really kind of uplifting that, you know, I can turn the deserts into oasis.

Well, I guess somebody might say when the regime does all it can to break us, expressing joy is a true act of defiance.

An absolute pleasure to talk to you.

Good luck in everything you do and trying to get the UK government to call this out.

I hope one day you see your family again.

Thank you.

And I also would like the listeners who are listening to this, please support the Stop Uyghur genocide, donate and join the fight.

Thank you.

Thank you.

So this is Rahima Mamut and the Soas Silk Road Collective, playing out this episode of the Restless Politics Leading.

So this is Rahima Mamut and the Soas Silk Road Collective, playing out this episode of the Restless Politics Leading.

Thank you.