



< Full episode

Transcript

## 667: Wartime Radio

*Note: This American Life is produced for the ear and designed to be heard. If you are able, we strongly encourage you to listen to the audio, which includes emotion and emphasis that's not on the page. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting in print.*

Prologue: Prologue

*This text is a transcript of a radio program about a self-organised radio station in Syria during the conflicts, called Radio Fresh.*

*Some parts of the text have been removed.*

(...)

**Hiba Abboud** [SPEAKING ARABIC]

**Dana Ballout** That's Hiba Abboud introducing the afternoon newscast. She's now the director of the women's division of Radio Fresh. She talked to me from the women's office over Skype.

**Hiba Abboud** [SPEAKING ARABIC]

**Interpreter** I never imagined that I would hear my own voice, or that I would be a reporter. Never.

**Dana Ballout** Hiba was a young newlywed who had just moved to town when she heard that Radio Fresh was recruiting women to go on air. She'd been listening to the radio and was curious what it was like to make it. So she, along with 20 other women, went to the first training. They did icebreakers, spent three days on voice technique.

**Hiba Abboud** [SPEAKING ARABIC]

**Interpreter** I don't know if you know this one, but when you put your pen in your mouth, this is a way to open up your voice.

**Dana Ballout** I did not know this one. Neither did most of the people at *This American Life*.

**Interpreter** And how to be as a presenter, and how to take breaths from your belly.

**Dana Ballout** Hiba passed the training and began working at the station, made news shows, programs about women's rights, interviews with local women who had lost their husbands in the war. By the time Raed put Hiba and the other women on the air in 2015, the Islamists in charge of Kafrenbel, Nusra, already hated Radio Fresh.

The station poked fun at them in all sorts of ways. For being illiterate, hypocritical. One satire depicted their religious police rushing people to the mosque without actually understanding the rules of prayer. Nusra assigned people to listen to Radio Fresh in shifts. They issued regular warnings and threats to the station whenever they heard something they didn't like.

Now Radio Fresh got a lot of warnings for having women on air. Nusra considered their voices shameful, a form of nakedness. Finally, in January 2016, Nusra had had enough. They burst in one morning to shut the station down, broke down the door, faces covered, carrying machine guns. They took everything-- laptops, the transmitter, Hadi's hookah, flash drives. Hiba and the other women watched the Nusra guys ransack the main station from another building, the women's office just up the hill.