

Hiba Abboud [SPEAKING ARABIC]

Interpreter And we looked out the window when we heard a lot of noise. So us girls, we just started gathering everything and hiding it. Because we said, you know, they were going to come to us next.

Dana Ballout They quickly rearranged the office to make it look more like a home.

Hiba Abboud [SPEAKING ARABIC]

Interpreter So we were preparing lies, you know, just in case that came in and they started questioning us. And you know, we were going to say like, "Oh, we're just girls here hanging out at her house, and we're just having breakfast together. A morning coffee or a mate.

(...)

Dana Ballout Nusra's other big demand was for Radio Fresh to take women off the air completely. Raed had a creative fix for this one too. Again, here's Hiba.

Hiba Abboud [SPEAKING ARABIC]

Interpreter So we were having a meeting, and he came and he told us that they wanted to transform our voices. You know, now we were going to use something to change our voices from female voices to male, and that you wouldn't be able to tell that it was a female in the first place.

Hiba Abboud [SPEAKING ARABIC]

Interpreter So when we first heard what our voices sounded like, we were laughing. And it was so strange, because we were like, really? This is what people are going to listen to? But after a while, it just became normal, and it literally got to the point where I could tell you which girl was which voice.

[CHUCKLING]

Dana Ballout But these days, Hiba just feels annoyed at the voice. And because the voice is so hard to listen to, Radio Fresh reduced how long women speak on the air to a fraction of what it was. By this past fall, the Assad regime had retaken swaths of the country. And in many other places, including Kafrenbel, extremists like Nusra were gaining power. People like Raed, people who didn't want Assad or the extremists, they barely held any ground.

(...)



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