

# **Falafel with Hezbollah**

Radical People Podcast

May 4, 2018

In this episode of Radical People Eamon talks with Hanna, who served two tours as an international volunteer in Rojava with the all woman fighting force, the YPJ.

Hanna is featured in the film "Fear Us Women" viewable here:

[fearuswomen.com/](http://fearuswomen.com/)

This is an article about how Turkish forces seized the Kurdish region of Afrin:

[www.nytimes.com/2018/03/18/world/...turkey-syria.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/18/world/...turkey-syria.html)

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-beQEVQWT1I>

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**Intro Music:** I received your message. Your fan of mine decided not to. All right. Let's fight. Let's rage against the night.

**Eamon:** Hello and welcome to radical people. My name is Eamon Fairley. I'm the host of this podcast and it is a podcast all about. Well, radical people. And by that, what do I mean? I mean people who try to go to the root of a problem, hence the word radical. But yeah, I like to focus the show on talking to people who are involved in various forms of direct action, direct action campaigns. And if you are a regular listener of the show or a recent listener of the show, you will recognize that I have been focusing on international volunteers who have gone and fought alongside Kurds in northern Syria in the area known as Rojava. I've spoken to a British. Volunteer and American volunteer, but both were men, and the cool thing about the rojava revolution the you know, this autonomous zone that they're trying to create in northern Syria is that. It's. You know, obviously. It's got a. Lot of cool things going on with like bottom up power and focus on ecology, but. It's also, you know, Hyper focused on creating an egalitarian society where men and women are equal, and this goes beyond just political structures. Obviously into social norms, but also, you know, in their in their military units. So with the People's Protection Units. The YPG. Is an all male unit, but they also. Have the Y. PJ, which is an all female unit and it is. You know, I would think it would be a little ridiculous for me to cover this topic without talking to a woman who had gone and served with the YPJ. It took me a minute. I've been trying to get in touch with a few and ultimately I was able to speak with a woman named Hannah Bowman, who has gone over there not only once, but twice. She's Canadian. And she's pretty \*\*\*\*\*. Her story is pretty cool, and some of the things she has done, sort of seemingly without fear are really impressive. So I'm glad that she made a little bit of time to talk to me, and yeah, let's just get down to it and hear from Hannah Bowman

**Eamon:** You are from the Vancouver area. If I have that right.

**Hanna:** Yeah, that's right.

**Eamon:** All right. And the cool thing about you is that you went to RO Java not once, but twice, right? That is really awesome. So if you don't mind, can you kind of? Tell me like what your initial like motivations were for the first trip? Like, was it more political or was it more, you know, what, like, what do you consider yourself sort of like a leftist person and you? Were into the cause. Of what was it like the cause of the political project of Rojava? Or was it more like, really? And antagonism towards Dash and the Islamic State. What was like the big motivation?

**Hanna:** The first time I went it was because I wanted to to fight ISIS and wanted to help the Kurds. I wanted to be part of the White PJ. I was really impressed with the White PJ. These women are fighting for women's rights and Middle East social inspired, but that that I wanted to be a part of it, and that was the reason why the first time. The second time I went because I just missed the girls in my unit and I wasn't happy being home. Living, you know, living where we do in the. West while they're out there. Suffering in the dirt, eating, you know, rice and beans and drinking dirty water and. I'd rather be there than here.

**Eamon:** And how long have you been home? Since the second time you went?

**Hanna:** I left Syria in June of 2016. I tried to get back in last summer, but I couldn't get in, so I stayed in Iraq in the Erville region for about four months, working there with some. People who were doing a delivery and food delivery to most soldiers during the whole operation, and then I came back from. There last September.

**Eamon:** Was the reason you couldn't get in just because the route by which they smuggled people in was sort of being monitored and stopped. Or.

**Hanna:** It was always being monitored and stalled. It's just it was much more difficult the second time and. You know, with, you know, a lot more politics. Involved in the second time and something so. Difficult. The third time.

**Unknown Speaker:** If.

**Eamon:** If you had full range of opportunity right now, would you go right back in right now?

**Hanna:** Maybe. Maybe. Yeah. I don't know. Maybe now that the fighting Turkey it becomes more difficult because anybody, a Westerner who fights the needle ally. And a lot more risk. Now, like they could be. Arrested when they return home. But you know, if they're not arrested when they return home, they may never be able to travel to Europe. So they could be arrested there. There could be an Interpol arrest form for them. Things like that. You know, there probably is an Interpol arrest warrant for for many of. Us already, but. You know, it would just be much more difficult and that's something that I don't think a lot of have taken into consideration right now or are out there fighting Turkey so. Yeah, it's difficult now.

**Eamon:** Do you still keep in contact with like the friends you made there? Like pretty, pretty easily?

**Hanna:** No, it's not easy to keep in contact with them to begin with. But I still do have contact with someone. Yeah, most of the girls in my units though. I have no contact with anymore. I heard that the my last unit was completely wiped out shortly after I left.

**Eamon:** Oh my God.

**Hanna:** So. Yeah. So I have no. No idea how any of them are doing. I don't know if it's true. I haven't been. Able to get permission of any of it. So.

**Eamon:** That's terrifying to hear. I'm sorry. That's really heartbreaking.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah.

**Hanna:** It is. It's very sad because it's. It's so unfair that these girls. Have to go through that when you know when it's the solution is easy. It's right there in front of us. But. The work is just not supporting it so.

**Eamon:** So if you don't mind, just so I can get a little back story for the people who haven't heard your story. You. What? What were you doing? Like, what was your sort of general day-to-day before you went to Rd. job at the first time? Like, what was your life like? Did you have a job? Did you do you have a like, what are your responsibilities? Do you have like children anything like that?

**Hanna:** I've been working in sales for a few years, so it was pretty boring. I'm I'm good at sales I. Just don't like it. And I had just lost my job about two months and I lost my job in June of 2014. And I was hit by a car, my motorbike and a bunch of things just went along, all within a short period of time. And I was just kind of like. I need to get out of here and need to change my life. So I moved this little remote island off the. Coast to BC and. You know to take time off and try and find something. Something that inspired me. And that's when I started to learn more about the white PJ and. The fight in Syria. I had. I had also been looking at joining the. Russian Ukrainian struggle. But I don't want to go get fight. With Russia. And there's a kind of hard to say. We're sitting right there.

**Eamon:** Yeah.

**Hanna:** But. So yeah, and then you know. The. There's like a it was just the perfect thing at the perfect time. I remember just thinking I don't want to watch this anymore. I don't want to read about it. Anymore, I want to be a part of it.

**Eamon:** That's incredible. Would you say then? Would you describe your your personal politics as in line with a lot of the politics that they were putting into place there in in Rojava like before you went, would you have considered yourself, say, like a revolutionary leftist before you had traveled there?

**Hanna:** No, no. And I still don't really consider myself that I'm not very politically minded. I'm more humanitarian minded. I believe in equal rights for everyone. The idea that some lives are worth more than others is the root of everything that is wrong with our world. So. It just. It was just naturally aligned with the way I am. and once I was there, though, I realized it was very similar. The society that trying to create is very similar to, say, the Canadian Society, multicultural multi ethnic, egalitarian, equal and everyone's welcome, right? So. Politically or socially, it wasn't much different than what I was already used to in Canada, so it wasn't really a stretch like that. And.

**Eamon:** MHM.

**Hanna:** I suppose that somebody had to put a political title on me now as they importing a bit more or less. But even like when you consider that the revolution there, you know they have the right to bear arms, right? They have the right to self-defense, which is more seems to be more of a right wing idea that America holds. Oh. Kind of kind of a mix of all things, right, left and right. I mean, it's left in the way that. And they believe anti sexualized government and self self administration and things like that. But at the same time it seems they have more of a right wing mentality with the idea that you can have guns and you can defend yourself and in case the government does get out of hand, you have that ability. Knock it back in place. Not really. I don't think it's really a. Left or right thing actually.

**Eamon:** So when you when you first went over there, so I've talked to a handful of people who have made the trip over there and I was really. I'm really grateful to speak with you because you're the first woman I've gotten to speak to. Who has done this. And obviously one of the very cool things about the the Kurdish project there is the fact that women. Are treated as equals even to the point of getting to participate in combat activity. For I think for a lot of people who might be hearing about this kind of concept of. Joining a foreign, you know, military of sorts, they might think of that as sort of a a macho idea, but it's it's not in the sense that, hey, there's it's equally women over there who are fighting and kicking \*\*\*\*\*. What was your sort of level of experience with like? The gun before you had gone over there.

**Hanna:** I used them like rifles, hunting rifles when I was a teenager, when I lived in the prairies. And. You know, we would go hunting, you know, although I've never actually shot an animal. But yeah, I used them for this. It's not a very complicated thing. It's just getting past the aerobic. Some people might have apprehension with the noise and. Stuff like that, but really. Not that big a. Deal. So it wasn't really. You know, when I. Was in the training. I was a. I was a good shooter and I was very accurate, and so they were pretty impressed with that. It wasn't really wasn't really anything for me.

**Eamon:** And you're basically just shooting off the irons on an AK47, aren't you like?

**Hanna:** Yeah, yeah. Initially everyone was given an AK. And depending how you prove yourself. And move on to other things.

**Eamon:** So when you you hit up the the YPJ via via Facebook correct and then arranged made your arrangements for travel.

**Hanna:** Yeah, that's right.

**Eamon:** Yeah. And then so you may then by doing that flying to northern Iraq and to Kurdish Iraq get and then from what I've heard, you just kind of have to sort of wait until a contact person gets in touch with you when you're there. And then they have a variety of methods of smuggling people into Syria. Correct.

**Hanna:** Yeah. When I first like I because I was one of the in the early groups that went there, it was not quite exactly like that. We were given the phone number to call. When we arrived and they told the cab driver where to take us and then, you know, like that, then we ought a safe house and they have to wait for a time to go over the border so that we can be just, you know, a few days or to be, you know, weeks. In my case, there's only a few days and there's three of us going over the. Order. August, the Spanish sniper. and the British Chinese, we went over the border together and. And actually, we left

the city together and we met up in. A mountain camp. With about seven other Westerners. And then we all went over the border together one night. You know, there's even. That alone is like an adventure.

**Eamon:** I would think so is. Especially since it's like right at the outset of your time there and it there must be, there must be a bit of an adrenaline rush going on with all this, no.

**Hanna:** It was pretty cool. Yeah, it was. I don't know if it was necessarily adrenaline, but I was very aware of the fact that I was living the things you see in movies.

**Eamon:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Hanna:** You know that so much better than what I had been doing with my life up to this point. It was. And now I'm actually felt like I was living part of something. And so yeah, it was really cool.

**Eamon:** Would you say that you were afraid at that time? Was there? Like I, I mean, I imagine there's a mix of emotions, but like, where was like your fear level? At cause? I can. I can just guess that for a lot of people this. Would be sort of a terrifying prospect.

**Hanna:** Nerves and people who have backed out like they've they've ended up in Iraq and then they changed their mind and wanted the home. And there's other people that who can't do the hike over the mountain and things like that so. I don't know. If it was fear that Yemen, and for some of them it was fear. But for me, no, there was never any fear with any of this process, there was. A moment when I was in Doha, in Qatar and I was on the the last plane to Iraq, and I thought, well, my contacts are bad. Then this is it. You know, I could be walking into an ISIS trap because they, you know, they want Westerners.

**Unknown Speaker:** So.

**Hanna:** When I'm sitting on the, I mean I can't get off the plane now. And it's. Too late so, but otherwise no, it wasn't really. There was like, you know, maybe a little concerned like we could get bombed in the mountains like Turkey or the Peshmerga or restaurants or something like that, but nothing really. I never really had any fear about any of it. I felt safe with these guys because.

**Unknown Speaker:** There's.

**Hanna:** It was clear that the, you know, they had a lot of experience moving people back and forth and this was something that wasn't new to them. This was quite the process. And then what they're doing. So I feel pretty safe with. The whole thing.

**Eamon:** Very cool. So you get there and then they they take you to like the International School, right? The place where they kind of give you some language training and the the weapons training and such.

**Hanna:** They actually didn't take me to that because like I said, I was one of the I was the second I was actually the third woman to join and was very much in the beginning, right? So they didn't have that Academy set up. I went to strictly to a Women's Academy and I was only there five days. There was no language training. There was no tactical medical training, some very basic.

**Eamon:** Oh, Rachel.

**Hanna:** Basic weapon training and that was actually quite annoyed with it because I've been told there would be 45 days training and I. Was looking forward. To medical and technical training and there was none of that. So you know, that was my experience. The Academy didn't open up until. The fall of 2015 like I. Think it was October so. And I was there in. March of 2015. So a long time before.

**Eamon:** So so you got sort of the express training you got?

**Hanna:** Yeah. Yeah, it was. It was actually a. Total of only four hours of training.

**Eamon:** OK.

**Hanna:** So and then they sent me my first unit.

**Eamon:** And then just learn on the fly.

**Hanna:** Yeah, that's pretty much it for another. Term lot of. It is common sense, so you don't stand there when bullets. Are flying, yeah. Sit down. Right. You don't sit there and keep shooting from the same location you. Move around a lot so.

**Eamon:** And then I guess too you can just kind of watch the people in your unit and did you pick up some basic some Kurdish while you were there like the the the basic commands of run run duck come this way, that sort of stuff?

**Hanna:** Yeah. Yeah, I picked up enough that I can get by. I picked up enough I could go into town on my own and do things, you know? Go for lunch to some shopping, hang out, stuff like that, yeah.

**Eamon:** Oh, that's all right.

**Hanna:** I wish I to learn more, but I'm not very good at learning. Languages so.

**Eamon:** Yeah, well, and especially if the a language doesn't have a lot of similarities to the one you. Already speak.

**Hanna:** Yeah, and the the grammar is actually different, not just the language, but the. Grammar is different too, so.

**Eamon:** Yeah. All right, so you're there. You're in? You get 4 hours of. Of hot training time and they assess, you know. Yeah, you're good. Hit the field. UM and then? And from what I've heard from other people there. Is a lot. Of downtime like there's a, you know, it's it's, it's not just like immediate. OK, now you're surrounded by explosions and grenades and all that. Like there's a. Lot of guard duty and things like that.

**Hanna:** Well, it depends on when you get there. Some people have gone straight to the Academy to you. Know helicopter operations so. It just depends on timing. I showed up just. Towards the end of the. Needs operation and so you know there was a lot of downtime. We sat there for about. 5-6 weeks just watching Dash territory on that defensive position in case they came out and we'd be fighting it the week before I. Showed up. They they had attacked. Him. So mostly I was just watching out for suicide trucks and stuff. One day there was 5 suicide trucks that came at the frontline positions. But that was it. So, and I was pretty bored. It was what missed mainly just learning and bonding with the girls. I hadn't really made a lot of girlfriends in the West. So there was a new experience for me bonding with that many. Girls and stuff like that, so that. Was good. I realized I had. Missed out on something special, but you know mostly only having guys with.

**Eamon:** Hmm.

**Hanna:** Been up to that six weeks. I was flying to a different unit until coming and it was a fighting unit. We were my first night there. We were in a firefight and. So yeah, that's I was like, so happy to be here. I think it was like my second or third day there sniper was shooting. At me while I'm trying to go to the washroom. Oh really? So. You know, so he was like, yeah, I was like, well. How? Because they're that's where I want to be.

**Eamon:** Would you say that the fear level increased with that first firefight, or were you just like, were you just amped like, This is why I'm here. I'm ready to go.

**Hanna:** Well, it was a little bit of anxiety because I didn't. Know what I was? Supposed to do at first, right? So and then the girls I was. In the room. Sleeping with about 5 other girls. And then there was another night also. This firefight breaks. Up outside and I can hear the girls outside. And they're like, you know, there's RPG and AK's and. And I'm. What the hell should? I do. Should I go up there and like? Well, you can't just run up there because then knows and nobody knows you're there and you can get shocked. So and the girls in the room with me weren't. Waking up and. I thought well. OK, so this tells me two things that the fact that girls outside are coming in to get it. Tell me they have it under control and the effect of the girls inside on weekends, so they're used to it so. Like, alright, alright, good evening. I love you with this so. After that it. Was just, you know. Learned pretty quick with. They were. They were. This group of girls who were experiencing stuff like that, so.

**Eamon:** That's that's pretty impressive to be able to just kind of sleep through a firefight like you're.

**Hanna:** Yeah. Yeah. First it seems weird, but you know, towards the end, like, even the mortar rounds, I didn't even get up the sofa for the last. Bit of mortar rounds. That came in. So these kind of get used to it.

**Eamon:** It just becomes the background noise of of existence.

**Hanna:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

**Eamon:** So when you went there the one time and then why did you? So since you've done 2 tours, so when you went? Do you call them tours? Is that what you call them or is that weird? Do you use that?

**Hanna:** You can go on storage and come home whatever you want. I think generally we.

**Eamon:** Cool. Yeah. So you did 2 tours. The first one. Did you just have a time limit set for yourself and you just said after this many months I'm leaving. Or was there like, another condition that drove you to want to?

**Hanna:** I've actually set a two year limit for me, but after three months I had lost about 30 lbs and I was so sick and I hadn't realized how sick I had become.

**Eamon:** Oh, nice.

**Hanna:** Like I knew I was losing weight because I was having a shower one day and there was a mirror in there and you guys only thought I'm so skinny I looked. Down. Ricks. I kind of hadn't. I knew I'd lost weight. I hadn't said. And then in the battle for tilapia it I had this, ISIS had blown up the bridge. And so we had to climb across and I had to jump down this little 4 foot ledge and. And then it was like my legs weren't even there, and I just landed in the dirt. And I thought because so much, I can't even catch myself. So that's I decided the next day I better get out of here and get healthy. And going home for a few months. That's when the media broke out. That's when the media heard about me being there and it started to get really crazy with the media. But I was missing my friends. So I. Said no, I need. To go back so.

**Unknown Speaker:** So you lost.

**Eamon:** 30 lbs was that just be due to like shift in diet, tons of activity, things like that?

**Hanna:** It's a diet we're not used to it. To that diet. You know, our food is so fortified and there's so much of it here. Then you go there and you're especially eating scraps. We went a week with just naan bread and water, things like that, like at the ballots out there. All we had that day was a couple of cans of tuna.

**Eamon:** Oh my gosh.

**Hanna:** And some naan bread and some water. So. It's the it's the dying and it's all Westerners going to lose a ton of weight until you get used to it, right? And you know, like by the same time I went there, I was getting used to it. I still lost weight, but to much longer to lose it.

**Unknown Speaker:** Hmm.

**Hanna:** So yeah, it's mainly the diet.

**Eamon:** When you came home, did you try to not immediately switch back to, like heavier foods like? Too much cause knowing that you want to eventually go, then to your job again so. Like did you try? Try to kind of stick to the non when you came home and.

**Hanna:** Well, when I came home, I wanted to stay healthy, skinny. But I just how long we now. I'm pretty fat again. So and actually this. Time it didn't go. It wasn't the muscle that we built, it was just fat. So I'm actually pretty up like 150 some pounds now, which is I've never weighed as much in my life. It's kind of gross.

**Eamon:** Hmm. Yeah, the, the, the shift back and forth must be your body must be like, what is going on like with just.

**Unknown Speaker:** Of.

**Eamon:** Like eating this food, eating that.

**Hanna:** I'm also like 49 years old now, you know, middle age, the body changes in your 40s anyway.

**Eamon:** Food eating this food.

**Hanna:** So it's all part of the process, I guess then? Keep thinking I need to. Put the whole job up for that role.

**Eamon:** Job with diet? Absolutely. Instead of the South Beach Diet, you're doing the the northern Syria diet.

**Hanna:** Yeah.

**Eamon:** You don't. You don't do Pilates. You run around with an AK and jump. Over broken bridges.

**Hanna:** Yeah. Get the dirt plane just there.

**Eamon:** So you'd you've gone home? Yeah, you. You got yourself back to a little bit of fitness, felt good and then got right back on a plane and went what was different the second time around.

**Hanna:** The second time around I was trying to work more. I thought I would go back and do some media work where I would document them. The courage more often or more. So I realized over the summer when I was back in Vancouver that. That was much more useful, like I could kill a. 100 ISIS fighters but it. It's not going to win the war, but like raising awareness and telling people what they're fighting for and who they are and humanizing them was much more useful. So I went back there the second time with the hope of being able to travel around from the unit and interview people and tell their stories and stuff like that. It didn't work out that way. So I ended up. I went back to the Academy to try and improve my Kurdish and spent a couple of months there at the new Academy and a couple of months there and I improved it a little bit. Then I went off to Kobani. And tried to join the heavy weapons unit and that was when the Tisuung operation was going on the site for Tisuung Dam. It wasn't very long before I had left and went. To Camacho and join the sniper unit. And I was there for about maybe six weeks and then I started working at the foreign. Public the YPJ. Public relations office helping them with their English translation. And then after that, I went to Daddy and I that was. My last name and she daddy. I was there for both another 6. Then my then I was getting so bored and it was just before the Manbij operation started. But I hadn't heard of it yet, so if I'd heard of it, I would have stayed. But I hadn't. I wanted to go to rock on, and it was like rock. Let's put it going to be another year. Kept it here in the desert for another year.

**Eamon:** Yeah.

**Hanna:** I went home and. Then I also went home because. A A friend had left had fled Syria and was in Iraq, and her mom had asked me to help her get to Canada. So like, OK, I'll go do that. So I came back to Canada to try and help her get to Canada. And I've been working on that for the last two years, but it looks like we're. Only a few months away now.

**Eamon:** Oh cool. So it's it's so interesting like like joined this. Then I just joined a sniper unit. It's it sounds very \*\*\*\*\*, but you say it and it's sort of just this like yeah, just like sort of passing away. It's like, yeah, heavy weapons over here. Then just did some sniper unit over there. Like what what in that time in that whole time period? Would you say was the most like, intense for you like in the sense of like? Did you? Were you ever afraid for your, like, afraid for your life? For you sound kind of just like it just became sort. Of par for. The course, and it didn't really affect you.

**Hanna:** Yeah, it does become like that for me. It did anyways. Because it's it becomes. It's like a job. It's your job, right? So. And although I enjoyed it, there was things I didn't like about it. You know, the downtime. Would get to me. You know, feeling somewhere to feel useful. And during the downtime you start to feel useless so that. Would get to me, but. There's times when you know, like the last few months I was there. I was like, please could I could please just attack us. So bored. I just wanna shoot. Someone in the face today? So it's. You know, so yeah, it could become just the way it is. I mean, and it and it becomes like that when you, when you dehumanize or when I dehumanize, I when I went there the first time I. Was. Very much the enemy is ISIS, but after you know some months, I realized that ISIS. Yeah, OK, they're they're the enemy. But the bigger enemy is Turkey. Like a tricky support license. So. That was more of a thing on my mind. I moved like it over the world is still going on about ohh. Isis is this. Evil thing? Only the Detroit to me, I've. Already moved beyond that. I'm on Turkey, right? So. That was my my more my thing was just like I was wondering, always wondering when Turkey go to bomb, you know, like, even the regime, even the regime would fly over everyday and helicopters to check our position. And I wasn't worried about the regime. I. Was worried about. Turkey and it was shortly after I left that Turkey started its campaign to really, you know, attack they killed. Israel and someone else in that air strike. In December 20, 2016, and. You know things like that so. My



concern was always more towards Turkey than worse Turkey. I mean, I said, yeah, you find that Turkey was more concerned with them and stuff like that.

**Eamon:** So in all that downtime, I imagine you built. A lot of camaraderie than with the other women who are serving.

**Hanna:** Hmm.

**Eamon:** Do you find now that you're no longer there, that that is really lacking in your life?

**Hanna:** It is. Yeah, definitely. I don't have the girlfriend like I did over there. I have a couple of friends here that. I only have one. That I bond with on that level. You know like that that I consider. That critical trend? I miss having that. Kind of friendship here, but I really the. Girls here I. Have trouble finding anything in common with them. You know they always talk about. Things I just have no interest in or the complaining about things that to me are just not worth complaining about, you know? So the war has definitely changed me. And, you know, it's made me more patient, but someone just made me more cynical. So yeah, I missed that and.

**Eamon:** Do you think there are when you so when?

**Hanna:** OK.

**Eamon:** You see the the. Political landscape of what they were trying to create in our job, or what? They are trying to create Rojava. Do you have any desire to try to push some of those? Like principles or concepts in in Canada like now that you're home, like do you do you feel do you feel like getting more politically? Engaged because of. What you saw or are you just more like concerned about the ongoing struggle there and focusing on that?

**Hanna:** I'm more concerned with struggles there because I don't know about the statement in Canada. Like I said, it's very much it's very similar to the society they're building there already. This still work to do in Canada, she went in regards to, you know, gender equality. So I don't know, but like I said before, I'm not very politically minded. So no, I don't feel the need to and I certainly don't feel the need to push. It. On anyone, because all you do is when you push something on someone, they get the sense of and they like that. So we're going to do. That but I try to. Live my life according to the values that I've developed over there and things like that. Hopefully people. Me and you as an example and try to, you know, some of it as well, but I know when the documentary came up, you know, Europe, women documentary that I've been, it's had a huge response from from people, especially women extreme in LA. And I had two standing ovations there and it's screened in New York and you know ovations there and stuff like that. So it's being received. Really, really well. And then and I and I know it's inspiring. Women. And some men. But you know, I'm mainly interested in how it affects the women, and sometimes they're they're. Just so happy. And then they're being and they're crying because they had no idea, you know, things. Like that so. In that regard, that's the way I would rather help people not push them. But, you know, maybe inspire them. So that's kind of what. I'm doing here but. It's not something not a conscious thing, not like. A God everyday. You know, people ask questions or something, then I'll answer. Them but. I'm not trying to push on anyone.

**Eamon:** Do you feel a difference in the way you're treated by men at home in Canada versus the way you were treated in Syria?

**Hanna:** Not really, because most people here have no idea. They have no idea about like DJ or the Y CG. They have no idea how they feel. I run into people still were like, oh, I've heard of like, you know, but they don't know. So. Nothing's really changed here, even with the people who do know me. Nothing's really changed, but life here isn't that bad, so I can't really complain about anything here. These are it's sexist. And you don't realize how sexist it is until you're away from it. Then you come back to. It because we. Grow up with it. So it's just normal, right? And then the women grow up being, you know being. Objectified or or or, you know, intimidate it or something. But we grew up with this. We don't realize how bad it. Is until we go away. From it and come back. That was a bit of a shock to me, but. Otherwise, no, nothing really any different. When people find out, sometimes they're like really ill. Thank you for your service. Question. Can't imagine that and stuff like that. The usual stuff, but nothing really changed here.

**Eamon:** Do you did? People in your immediate life, like your immediate family. Did you tell them before you went?

**Hanna:** I told my mother and she didn't try to talk me out of it. She knows better. She even said that if she were younger, she would have done the same thing. So she's also very minded. My brother found out from the media and he was mad. But you know, too bad for him and my sister.

**Eamon:** How are you?

**Hanna:** Doesn't seem to have anything you need. To wait on it so. You know, I know she worries, but she doesn't. For the past so. But you know. I did not. My validation code doesn't come from my family. You know, I don't need their approvals. Or anything so. Whatever they thought of. It either way, it didn't really matter to me.

**Eamon:** Yeah, I just asked cause it could just. I mean for it's just different for different people and you know some people like just didn't tell anyone in their family and then some people told their family and their family like freaked out. And so I was, you know, and it's it's obviously like the context you come back to because you're obviously it can be kind of hard to shake your family at times.

**Hanna:** Yeah.

**Eamon:** But. So you so you, you're now you're now you're back and obviously the situation over there has changed. So I mean at first with this huge you know fight as you said it was it was ISIS, ISIS, ISIS and you moved on mentally and we're like OK the real the real deal here is Turkey because they're the ones buying the oil from ISIS and giving them money and giving them weapons and support and all that.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah.

**Eamon:** But obviously that has changed. Also, public perception of the entire situation because. It's so easy to get behind a fight against ISIS, right? Like they're just these. It's so easy to. Just. Put them in the evil box and be like, Oh yeah, go blow them up. \*\*\*\* those \*\*\*\*\*. But now that now that it's a NATO ally now that it's supposedly moderate Turkey, you know, supposedly democratic Turkey, whatever, who is invading all of a sudden, there's a lot more media. Silence about the Kurds in northern Syria and the YPG. And as you said, the situation has changed for any international volunteers who go and fight. What do you think? Is what do you think now is a smart thing to do for you know Westerners or just any internationals who want to support the the Kurdish project? Like how can people do that if there's now this bigger player in the game with Turkey?

**Hanna:** Well, the best thing, the most important thing we can do is to raise awareness, Mr. Turkey. Role in that? We really have to push our government to take a strong stand against Turkey and to support the Kurds. I know they seem more interested in the government, seems more interested in supporting Turkey. Because they don't want Turkey to fall to Russia. Fine. Whatever. I get that. But. We they can still. It's kind of hard to say like you can't really support Erdogan, but a clear conscience. But they should support the Kurds. They should support regime change in Turkey and stop worrying about Assad. I don't know. Yeah, I. Guess the best the solution. It seems to be that Erdogan is using all the refugees that fled. As a bargaining chip to get into the EU and and, you know, do as I say, I'm gonna release more refugees off you. And. The solution for the refugee crisis is pretty simple. It's that you helped rebuild the Kurdistan region, the Kurdish region of Syria. You support it being protected from Turkey and those refugees will want to go home. They don't want to go to Europe, they just want to go home. Right. So if we give them the ability to go home, they will take away turkeys, leverage against the EU and against. The world essentially. Once that's happened and Turkey won't be as big a nuisance as it is now or again, we'll have as much power as it does now. The only thing that the only bargaining chip you'll have left is if, well, maybe I'll go stepping over to Russia. They're NATO, but at least you will at least say millions of refugees and help them rebuild and develop a New Democracy. In northern cheer, because it really is the only hope for peace in the region. You have all this tried mentality and you know, religious fundamentalism and stuff like that. And history has shown that that mentality does not is not conducive to peace. So the people that they want democracy, they want the real democracy and as a parent, whenever we would clear those areas of ice and they would come out

and greet us. Now they're so happy. So. That's the best solution for the Region. It's also the least likely to happen cause I have no faith in, you know. Western policy anymore. They abandoned the Kurds. And that friend. They let Turkey come in and, you know, slaughter them and stuff like that. So now Turkey is threatening mandation. The Americans have said, well, we're in mandate. We're not leaving. So you know? OK, sure, you've. Said that before though. Right. So only time will tell. It would be a shame if you know the US backed out of mandate because then the Kurds would have to find out what Turkey again and. And when the Turks don't have air support that well, Turkey. So it's such a mess there right now. It's worse now than it was before. Like you said, it was easy to paint ISIS as the evil one. Now it's harder to paint. Turkey is evil 1 because it's a NATO ally. I still run into people who have no clue that Turkey is doing these things like, well, isn't Turkey our NATO ally? And. Yes. And you know, and through that we are supporting a genocidal regime and those kind of alliances that led to World War. One so I think. Politically, our governments really need to rethink and reassess our our, our, you know, relationship with Turkey. But I think it's just, it's just going to get a lot. Worse, before it gets better there which? Really irritates me because you know what if Turkey wants to Duke it out with some of the other countries, go ahead, I don't care. Leave my friends alone and introduce the courts alone. They deserve a break from all different. You know, the subject of murder and genocide and you know, all kinds of horrible things for so long that anyone deserves peace in the region to them.

**Eamon:** It's it's just heartbreaking to hear. I get it's it's one of the things that's happening in the world. Right now that I'm the most. Interested in and emotionally invested in and it it I haven't, I haven't. You know, I haven't been there and I haven't had the interactions that you've had in it and it pains me from this distance because I feel so. I feel so helpless. You know, it's like I wish there was something I could if I could mail them a box. Of ammo and cash and MRE's I would you know if there was some way to, like, FedEx them stuff. I'd be mailing them stuff every day. Like, if there was, like, you know, something that material I could do, I would. I would hop right on it. And it's it's horrible. Just every day to see the updates, see the tweets, see the, you know, the news stories or whatever. And just. To feel so far away and sort of impotent. But if after listening to this there's someone out there you know in Canada or England or France or wherever, who says, you know what? Screw it. I'm in the same situation. I hate my job. I'm not feeling connected to where I live and I want to help these people, you know, Turkey be damned if someone was just going to go there. And join up as an international, what advice would you give them before leaving?

**Hanna:** I would tell them to bring a lot of patience. Because you'll need it. I would tell them to try as hard as you can to learn the language, because you will only go as far as. Your language skills take you. Well, I would tell them to leave your attitude behind because you might be American. You might be British, whatever, but over there, nobody cares, right? They appreciate you being there. And they love the fact you're there and they think it's a big honor that you would leave your safe home to go and help them. But. The attitudes that some people they're with don't help the willing to learn about their society, their culture. If you segregate yourself in an all Western unit, you will miss the beauty of what's really there. You will miss the beautiful Syrian people. I tried to only stick with Kurdish units because, you know, I'd like the experience of being in a different culture different. People and stuff like. That if I want anything with Westerners, I would. Just stay home.

**Eamon:** Good point.

**Hanna:** So those are those are probably the best advice. You don't need a lot of gear, you know, like from a physical point of you don't need a lot. You have to you essentially if you want to go there take what you can carry and keep in mind. That. You going to lose? Weight. You lose a lot of muscle and you're going to get weaker. But that's it. You know, they provide everything you need physically to provide the weapons, the ammo, the uniform, the accommodations, the food and all that. So you don't need that stuff. So just bring lots of patient. Bring skills. The more skills you have, the better. Learn the language and be willing to hang out with courage and understand the Syrian people because they're like friendly people like that. You know they're unbelievably friendly and they're so similar to us. One of the things that I noticed is I had walked to a little store one day and we would actually walk

to the store quite often and it was a couple miles away from our. And we would sit on the front stoop and drink a a Pepsi and eat some chips and the locals would come by and we'd chat with them. And, you know, people drive by and we wave and they wave back and stuff like that. They. Were just very friendly and very normal. And I remember when they said nothing new. This is the exact same thing I do about that. In Canada, I go down the coffee shop. I have a talk. To some people. You know it's the same thing. Right as. The same majority of people there are exactly like. Right, that's just. You know, normal people want to get by, want to make a living, want to raise a family, you know, make life better for their kids and stuff like that. Just want to be friendly and they love meeting new people. And they love talking and showing off. Their houses and their lives and stuff like that. So it's that's the part I love about region. You know, I live in Camille for a few months and I'd love that city. It was just so much fun there. The people were so nice there, and I would even go through regime checkpoints and even the regime soldiers would just wave and smile and stuff like that because nobody really wants to fight at all. So to follow up for shop one day and I was in line with the Rahim soldier and a Hezbollah soldier, and we're all, we're all just chatting and laughing. You. Know and stuff like that and. That's the way it is. Nobody wants to fight. I mean, they get some cycles who want the fight. They seem to be politicians, but generally. You know, everyone just wants to get along. And. That's the thing that we should keep in mind whenever we hear any news story from these regions, especially, they're not a bunch of angry jihadists running around trying to put up these other sites. They're not all into child marriage and and, you know, female slavery. That's that's they don't want that. They're not part of that. They want to be part of the 21st century. But their governments are keeping them down. Their religious fanatics are keeping them down. You know the extremists are keeping them down, but they want to move beyond that. So that's something we should. If you go, there's something you should keep in mind, but as we watch it on the news. That something we should keep in mind that. We are, we're. We're more likely we're different, so. That's what I wanted to see more people realize.

**Eamon:** I'm sure that's probably true across the world. That you know, by and large, like any any human anywhere is just a a human and wants to just attain happiness and live and live in peace. And it's usually, yeah, it's usually people who have some sort of power or financial interest that are trying to stir everyone else up to to kill each other.

**Hanna:** Yeah.

**Eamon:** Uh. and and. The hope is that one one day we can. Round all those people up and push them off the iceberg and I'll just kind of chill and be groovy for the rest of the time.

**Hanna:** Yeah. If we could find the gene that causes greed, then we'd be fine.

**Eamon:** I love the I love the image of you standing in line for a falafel with a Hezbollah soldier and or a Syrian regime soldier. And then you guys all just kind of start chatting. That's that's pretty awesome.

**Hanna:** Yeah, yeah, I had a similar experience in Mosul too. Just driving a truck down the road and in front of me was like a leg and truck and was full of soldiers and I'm looking at them like, oh, they're all left folders and they're waving at them and they're all smiling and waving back.

**Eamon:** You guys will start start taking like selfies with each other stuff and.

**Hanna:** Yeah, yeah. Well, they do that a lot. Actually. I have selfies with all kinds of, you know, people.

**Eamon:** Like that, it's almost like the license plate game, like you're just like collecting. How many different like representative soldiers of different like regimes that you could have? A selfie with.

**Hanna:** Yeah, it is. There's there's a patch game that you want to collect as many patches from different groups as they can.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah.

**Eamon:** That's pretty cool.

**Hanna:** Yeah, sorry.

**Eamon:** How how was the falafel?

**Hanna:** It's a really popular falafel shop, so it's been.

**Eamon:** Really good. That's really good. OK. Is.

**Hanna:** That's why there's so many people in.

**Eamon:** My life, my favorite falafel I've ever had is was that is it this Lebanese restaurant in Chicago, and I think they're just the best. Shout out to salton's market and I've, but I've only had them across like the United States. So that's not saying very much so. I'm sure superior.

**Hanna:** Well, it's the same without saying, you know, not really much defense the only. Thing is over there. They were made fresh when you order them so you don't see that here as often.

**Eamon:** Yeah, that's nice. Well, Hannah, thank you so much for talking to me today. If is there anything I miss? Is there any, like, giant important thing that you feel needs to be said on the issue that I didn't prompt you to say?

**Hanna:** Well, no, just that, you know, like I said, politically we need to support. The the Kurdish Revolution in northern Syria. I'm not talking about. Well. Thing, I mean, the Kurds in Iraq, sure, but mostly in Syria, because they're whether the society, they're building it, they said the democratic, true, true democracy, egalitarian, secular, non religious stuff like that that people want to know more about my time there and the girls I was there, they can go look at my documentary. I didn't make it as had nothing really to do with it other than they asked me for an interview and then it turned into this. Really amazing documentary. That's that's winning all kinds of awarding and lots of notice. It's at crswomen.com. It's free. It's short 2027 minutes.

**Eamon:** That's that's.

**Hanna:** Hopefully maybe first go ahead.

**Eamon:** It's called serious women. Serious women was the. Name of it.

**Hanna:** Here us women.com.

**Eamon:** Ohh yeah, fear us women. That's right. Fear us women fear us, women.com.

**Hanna:** Yeah. And it's yeah, it's the first line from my tattoo. And yeah, so that's it just, you know, pressure our governments to support the Kurds in Syria, not to abandon them again.

**Eamon:** As as one of my previous interviewees. Who had gone to? Syria said the US is the world's flakiest. Ally and I have to.

**Hanna:** Yeah, I could. I think good way to describe it.

**Eamon:** So thank you so much for your time. Good luck with everything. Good luck with helping to get your friend into Canada and you know, be safe. And yeah, if you if you do go back, you know, be safe and kick \*\*\*\*.

**Hanna:** Alright, thank you very much. Thanks for having me on.

**Eamon:** Yeah. Take care.

**Outro Music:** Let's fight. Let's rage against the night.

**Eamon:** The music in this episode of Radical People is the song Lazarus online by the band Wolf Parade off of their new album 'Cry, cry, cry'. This episode will conclude, I guess my series on international volunteers in Rojava. I kind of liked doing this like one topic a couple episodes perhaps I will do that again in the future. I don't know. We'll see how it spins out.

If you happen to have a story that you think belongs on this show. Or maybe your friend does like they have this \*\*\*\*\* action story and it's so good and you think should be on the show, but they don't want to tell it because they're humble and they're like, no, it wasn't me. You know, a lot of people, it's not that interesting. You know, they've got great, like character traits where they don't like to brag and stuff. Well, that makes it hard for me. So maybe you can help me out. By, you know, egging them and telling me and then I'll talk to them. But come on, it will be. Time and they'll say no, I'm not really good storyteller. I'm saying it's just a conversation. Whatever. If you want to help me get more stories on this show about a wider variety of topics with a wider variety of people. So it's not just whoever I can get my little tentacles on hit me up at Twitter at Radical under score podcast. That's Twitter at. Radical under score podcast or conventionally through, you know, electronic mail, AKA e-mail at radicalpeoplepodcast@gmail.com where of course you're not going to say anything hyper illegal or totally sketch because you know the government reads all that stuff clearly so. Right now, obviously

have the SoundCloud page up where you can find show notes. On this show I'm going to put a link to fear US women. The documentary Hannah was talking about on this episode also put up some links about what's going on with Turkey invading Kurdish regions in Syria and no need to do any donating to the show because Blue Apron sponsors me now. Blue apron. Do you want to have meals that are? I'm just kidding. There's no blue apron sponsorship, no stamps.com. They don't love me. I don't talk about male enough, but I am part of the Channel 0 network now. That's right. Channel 0. Y'all. Check it out. In fact, right now I'm going to play some ads for some channel 0 shows, because that's what we do to help each other out and boost each. Stuff. I love you. I'll talk to you later. Bye.

**Unknown Speaker:** We are at war.

**Solecast podcast advert:** The sole cast is a twice a month anarchist podcast hosted. North American rap artist soul. It's a podcast about revolutionary politics from an anarchist perspective. Every month I interview academics, journalists, revolutionaries, quote UN quote, activists, artists, musicians, and really anything that I find interesting. I never got to go to college, so this is, I guess is. My CHEAT SHEET. So anybody who wants to look. You can learn with me. Subscribe in itunes@tinyurl.com/soulcast and check it out on the Channel 0 podcast network.

**Unknown Speaker:** We are at war.

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Interview with Internationalist Fighter in Syria Radical People #10. You can find Hanna Böhman's  
youtube channel here.

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