

Podcast Review: “The Copernic Affair”

By the Hassan Diab Support Committee

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Canadaland's [“The Copernic Affair”](#) is an ambitious but ultimately flawed six-part podcast series that investigates the bombing of a synagogue on Rue Copernic in Paris in 1980, and the case of Hassan Diab, a Canadian sociology professor wrongfully accused of carrying out that bombing.

The series, hosted by journalists Dana Ballout and Alex Atack, delves into the evidence, legal battles, and questions of justice surrounding this case. The podcast brings much-needed attention to a case invalidated by weak evidence, procedural irregularities, and wrongful prosecution. It examines whether Diab is guilty or a scapegoat, offering exclusive interviews and archival material.

The podcast was publicly launched on January 22, 2025, with early access available to Canadaland supporters. Episodes cover key events such as the 1980 bombing, investigation, extradition, and trial in France.

One of the podcast's achievements is its broad scope. It provides an in-depth examination of the case, giving voice to many of the key players, including Hassan Diab himself, his legal teams in both Canada and France, members of the Diab Support Committee, representatives of the French judiciary, and families of the victims. This breadth of perspective conveys the human cost of the legal saga, particularly for the victims of the bombing as well as for Dr. Diab, whose life has been upended by accusations built on discredited evidence and secret intelligence – despite a powerful alibi and fingerprint analyses that exclude him as a suspect.

While the series does a good job of compiling key interviews and laying out a detailed chronology, it ultimately falters in its framing, often reinforcing the very misconceptions it seeks to debunk.

The chronological storytelling structure helps listeners grasp the convoluted history of the case, spanning over four decades. The podcast effectively highlights the reliance of French authorities on unsourced intelligence—material that would be inadmissible in Canadian and most Western courts but which played a pivotal role in Dr. Diab's prosecution. Marc Trevidic, the lead investigator in France for many years, demonstrates no qualms about relying on “an intelligence report citing unnamed sources who claimed to know who was behind the bombing”. This contextualization is crucial for audiences unfamiliar with France's legal approach to counterterrorism cases.

However, by covering the case in chronological order and reiterating the accusations in great detail, the series risks embedding those very accusations in the minds of listeners—especially those who may not make it to the later episodes, where the case's

weaknesses are more thoroughly exposed. This narrative choice inadvertently strengthens the credibility of discredited evidence in the public imagination.

Moreover, the podcast fails to underscore the profound flaws in the case against Dr. Diab. For instance, the podcast presents the suspect descriptions as if they were largely consistent, omitting the fact that the descriptions are rife with contradictions.

Similarly, while the podcast discusses the handwriting analysis that initially linked Dr. Diab to the crime, it does not adequately emphasize how this analysis was later dismantled and ultimately dismissed by France's Court of Assize.

The podcast mentions that Dr. Diab's passport is a key piece of evidence, but it fails to mention that investigators don't actually have the passport. Instead, they have a poor-quality photocopy of a passport with some questionable (possibly forged) stamps and missing pages.

Also, the podcast fails to mention that Canada's extradition law is not balanced, and France does not extradite its own citizens.

Another particularly problematic moment occurs when the podcasters express dissatisfaction with Diab's responses to questions, suggesting that they did not receive the "straightforward answers" they were looking for. However, since Diab provided clear "yes" or "no" responses, this remark feels unjustified and casts doubt on his credibility without cause.

There are also troubling biases in the podcast's descriptions of some of Dr. Diab's supporters. A meeting at a Unitarian retirement community in Ottawa is characterized by references to "free coffee people" and "shuffling," which carries ageist undertones that diminish the legitimacy of those advocating for Diab's justice.

Perhaps the most significant omission in "The Copernic Affair" is its failure to emphasize that France's primary case against Diab relied on unsourced intelligence rather than concrete, verifiable evidence. While the podcast does acknowledge that the evidence was "circumstantial and weak," it does not sufficiently challenge the core legal issue: intelligence reports from unnamed sources should not form the basis of a criminal conviction. This fundamental concern has been flagged by multiple human rights organizations, yet the podcast does not explore this critique in depth.

Similarly, the podcast uncritically relays statements from French officials, such as the prosecutor's claim that Diab's absence from the 2023 trial was a disgrace. It fails to counterbalance this with the fact that overturning the decision of the investigating judges by the French Court of Appeal was an unprecedented legal move, or that Diab had already endured over three years in pretrial detention in a French prison.

Overall, "The Copernic Affair" is a valuable contribution to public awareness of a grave miscarriage of justice, but it stumbles in execution. Its detailed investigation is

commendable, but its narrative structure and framing choices muddy the waters. Listeners who make it to the final episodes will come away understanding the deep flaws in Diab's conviction—but those who drop off early may walk away with the wrong impression. For those interested in justice and wrongful extradition and conviction, the podcast is worth listening to—but it should be approached with a critical ear.