

EMNA MIZOUNI TRANSCRIPT

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Carthagina, women, girls, Tunisia, activists, Digital Citizenship, community, history, heritage technology, safe spaces, online, online harassment, trolling, doxing, women's rights, adolescent girls, love, activism, sisterhood

SPEAKERS

Betty Kankam-Boadu, Emna Mizouni

Emna Mizouni 00:00

Knowledge is very, very expensive for us. Data is expensive, for example. If we do not really make sure that there is part of that knowledge that exists somewhere is accessible to people, we're going to be behind in everywhere. And here comes the disparity that we were talking about. It's the privilege that some people they cannot see. It's not the bling bling that comes with the word free knowledge or open knowledge. It's the need that comes from the ground.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 00:35

Hello, and welcome to Inspiring Open, candid conversations with influential women who have made an impact in Africa. We're talking about their personal, educational and career journeys, the choices they have made along the way, and what they have gained by setting aside their doubts in a world where women's voices and opinions often go ahead and unacknowledged. Inspiring Open is a space to explore the value of sisterhood and how networks of sharing and openness can create waves of change. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu, a journalist and women's rights advocate. Join me as I explore the fascinating backstories behind Africa's most tenacious female personalities. Inspiring Open is a podcast series from Wiki Loves women, a project of Wiki In Africa. Be inspired, be challenged, be bold.

On Inspiring Open today is **Emna Mizouni** . After the 2011 Arab Spring in Tunisia, Emna and her team realised that there was little to no information about the rich culture and heritage of their country, and that needed fixing. Emna's love for technology, history and monuments is what birthed Carthaginian organisation that works to document tradition, history and heritage for future generations, as well as promotes that rich Tunisian culture worldwide. She also co-founded digital

citizenship and initiative and consultancy for the digital inclusion of women and girls emanates and advocates for open culture and open knowledge. She is well known for your contributions to several international entities focusing on human rights and technology.

Emna's love for technology, history and monuments is what birthed Carthagina, an organisation that works to document Tunisian history and heritage for future generations, as well as promote that rich Tunisian culture worldwide. She is also the co-founder of Digital Citizenship, an initiative and consultancy for the digital inclusion of women and girls. Emna is an advocate for open culture and open knowledge. She is well known for her contributions to several international entities focusing on human rights and technology. It feels good to have her on the podcast today, so let's get right into it.

How is Tunisia for people who've never been there before? What are, say, the misconceptions that you'd like to clear about your country?

Emna Mizouni 02:33

Ooh, there are so many. So whomever is following Tunisia's news online, might be depressed from the political and social unrest; challenges that the country has been going through. But the other reality and the other side of life in Tunisia is really something beautiful. It's challenging as any other African country. And we have that stereotype: we have the sun, we have the beach, we have the mountain, we have everything. But also it's challenging in terms of everyday life. On the side, the good things about Tunisia is the warmth of people, the very rich history. And there are plenty of things to adore about it. As I said, it's like the nature, the people, the traditions, the places you visit, the history you learn about, the different civilizations that cross the country and made Tunisia what it is today. And the good thing is that it's North Africa, and so we have a little bit of the African culture very embedded within our everyday culture. And that sometimes when I meet my fellow Africans from other Sub-Saharan countries, they're like, "Oh, you look like us, actually." I was like, "Yes, we're African, too." It's like, it's very important to emphasise that. Those are the things that we don't talk about. One anecdote on Tunisia, and how it's seen. Lately, I met someone whose dream was to visit Tunisia. He studied, in his minor in university, about Tunisia. About the history, about visiting and everything. And so I think there are plenty of people like that. And I urge them to visit.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 04:37

Where did you grow up in Tunisia? And what kind of upbringing did you have?

Emna Mizouni 04:45

So, I'm from Tunis, and I grew up in Tunis, the capital. I'm a city girl. I grew up in Tunis. My childhood was split between the Medina and Bardo. What I really think about is how growing up in

the Medina old city of Tunis and in Bardo shaped my personality a lot. From all of the traditions that I learned about, all of them, we were talking about the warmth of people, the hospitality, the humility, how friendly they are. No matter from where you come, what's your religion, or where you come from, what you do in life, that doesn't matter as much as who are you as a person. And so that human side mattered a lot. And so, yeah, I spent most of my life there. Let's say all of my life there.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 05:45

And what kind of values or principles would you say your parents instilled in you that you still carry along to this day?

Emna Mizouni 05:53

In terms of values, I think, the universal values. It's like humility, how you don't lie to people, how you respect them, how you accept the other, how you like the first principle is do not harm anyone, do good for yourself, for your family, for your community. I've never been restricted like other of my friends at early age have, from, for example, going out and helping in community work, because I was a girl, for example. I saw that happening to other female friends, and that hurt me a lot that they were restricted from, for example, doing community work. A cleaning day in the neighbourhood or helping the people in need. And, I think, this is part of how I grew up. It's not about myself. It's about myself as a whole part of a community, but also myself where I could bring to the community. That was very important. So yeah, my parents and my siblings helped a lot on this.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 07:11

And the other girls that were restricted, like your friends, who were restricted from engaging in communal activities, what, in your estimation, was that reason?

Emna Mizouni 07:23

The main reason was girls cannot go outside in the streets. Or, why would you clean the streets? One thing is, we have a tradition and some neighbourhoods in Tunis, is that, by the end of the day, early evening, you have the household, or the men of the house in a patriarchal society that goes up and cleans in front of his house. And it's a very Mediterranean thing where, and especially in summer nights or spring, they put chairs and tables in front of the houses and sit there. So they do their part in cleaning, but if we talk about cleaning the common space, the garden that is in between all of the houses, the girls are not supposed to do that. And sometimes even boys, depending on the age, but most of the time girls are not allowed to be in the streets. They're not allowed to talk to boys. That changed a little bit, but unfortunately, from my work with adolescent girls, I see it

happening again. They are not allowed to do a lot of outdoors activities because of their gender, basically.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 08:47

Interesting, because you would think it's because of safety reasons.

Emna Mizouni 08:52

Part of it is safety reasons. You don't know if like kidnapping could happen. All of that. If the girls or not, or let's say children are not controlled and monitored by an elder person, anything could happen, like car accidents, kidnapping, and there was a lot of that. But also, it's mainly the gender thing. You cannot do that because you're a girl, you cannot do this because you're a girl. And that continues in different shapes right now. As I said, from my work with adolescent girls, I see like, she cannot have a smartphone because she's a girl. She's not a priority in the house. Even if she's the eldest, she's still not a priority. The boy would, who is like, I don't know, one or five years younger, might have a smartphone and she does not.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 09:50

I'm happy you had a different experience then. And I guess that is what has shaped you into who you are today. I want to know what you studied in school. And Did you always know that this would be your career path?

Emna Mizouni 10:05

Did I always know? No, honestly. I am the product of a public school in Tunisia. And it's so unfortunate to see the decline in the quality of education in Tunisia. If it's not private education,... the students are struggling unfortunately. But I studied, if I go slowly from university, I did Marketing and Communications. I did Management and Business Administration. And before that I had a baccalaureate in sciences. And I studied sciences specifically to become something else. It's funny, I went to sciences to mainly become a pilot. And then, that was one of the things I wanted to do as an adolescent, but then I was like, oh, no, what about finishing and then sciences. And then I was a little bit rooted. Again, I'm a city girl, so very rooted with my family. I did not want to move to another city to study something else related to sciences. So I moved to management and business administration. So that was not my intention at all. And from communications to the civic work to the change that happened in the country, all of that moved me from, basically, from the sciences, from everything that I had in mind to something pretty new: that is management. I struggled a lot at the beginning, because why didn't I do economics, for example, as my baccalaureate, and then I struggled a little bit in my education at the beginning. And then I said, I succeeded in many things,

why not? Let's try it. And I did. I succeeded in it. And then I changed into communications, because I did not like the ... not the management life, but, I did not like working in the bank. And at the time, I had an internship in a bank, and that was pretty much a fancy life to have. But I did not like it at all. So I changed into communications and marketing. And that changed a lot in my career later on. And so from that to being an activist and working and making a social change, there is a huge difference.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 12:35

And how are you finding your life in communications, in social change in activism? How is that life like for you?

Emna Mizouni 12:45

I really found myself in here. My personality was shaped in a different way, I found that I have a contribution and I have something to leave behind. The change that I see in the society and the small communities that I am part of, or the communities I'm trying to influence, the projects that I am leading, and the impact they leave behind, all of that is very rewarding to myself, to the community. And so I feel so happy about this shift in my career. I hardly can see myself as a banker, or any of what I was doing. No! I see myself a lot with people. And that's part of why I succeeded in communications. And I loved that job for a while. But because we have so much to do in our societies, whether it's Tunisia or elsewhere across Africa, we have a lot of challenges. We have a lot of disparities and gaps to fill. There is a lot of things to do that I would keep working and the social aspect as much as I am breathing, I guess.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 14:04

Interesting you talk about gaps to fill, and that will bring me to Carthagina. Yeah, I think it's incredible work you're doing there. What problem did you seek to address when you started Carthagina?

Emna Mizouni 14:19

You know, Carthagina is the first baby to be my own baby. Before that I was part of many associations and organisations in Tunisia, mainly in the culture or humanitarian sectors. But then, we go back here to where I grew up. I started supporting the difference in terms of, not knowledge, but in terms of knowing your environment, and where you come from. When I did a lot of that humanitarian work, and culture events across the country, I saw that what I knew as a kid that grew up in the Medina in a very Tunisian family, was not known by other people. And I started digging hard. My very big passion to history from the beginning, from when I was a kid. All of that combined

with the crisis that we were living in Tunisia after the revolution, it's like, whether we were Arabs, or African or Amazigh, or I don't know why. It's like different identities, Muslims, or no we have Christianity before Judaism, all of those religions and identities and civilizations that cross the country. And the debate when we were writing the Constitution, the 2014 Constitution, all of that was an incentive, basically, to have something that addresses the identity crisis that we were living in. And here came the idea of Carthagina. I had it as an idea, I spoke to friends, who are the co-founders, and we ended up making it happen. We're good at doing what? We're very passionate about history. We're good at using social media. Everybody's interested in what's happening on social media. We're good at getting and keeping the community together. Let's build a community, let's do something. Let's try to preserve and document our own heritage and history. And that's how it happened. It started in 2013 as a community. And I'm so, so proud of the history of Carthagina from 2013 until now. So there are plenty of challenges around Carthagina, but the whole idea is about, basically, preserving as much as we could of what we have.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 17:03

I think you've mentioned that when you started Carthagina people in government or in authority, and, you know, historians, like you just mentioned, didn't take you serious, or you and your team serious because they thought you were young, you know, young people who want to change the world like face this dismissiveness. What would you tell the older generation about giving young people a chance to make the change they seek to make in this world?

Emna Mizouni 17:33

It's not easy, but with a lot of dedication you can you can make it happen. As I mentioned, we were younger when we started Carthagina, in our mid-20s. The eldest of us are early 30, I think the really eldest one of us, who was the Secretary General. But when you put a group of young people, they're going to ask for authorizations, partnerships, to present the whole new idea of merging history, heritage, and technology and social media. There are a lot of new change and new things to start and try that, by nature, that a human being would resist to that. One: we resist out of ignorance, or not knowing what we're talking about. Two: out of ignorance to our age, basically. And our being like, you're young, you don't know. We've been around for years. And when we talked with some people who were there doing some work in, not only public administrations, but also other organisations in the country, they were doing this civil society work under the old regime for 30 years or more. And so, for them, they know the administration, which is true, but they don't know what people want right now. Because there is that gap between them and the people. They're in the bubble of the administration. But some people, some of them, they really believed in us. When you're dedicated and passionate about something, that passion could make you win the heart of the receiver, or the potential partner. And that's how we, we won some of these as partners, and they

became our advocates actually. They took us to meetings, and they were like, "These are a group of young people we want to help. We want to work with. These are the future of our organisations, of the civil society work. Let's give them a chance." I went through the burden of being young, being a woman and being leader at the same time. But if you don't persist, if you don't have a goal you want to reach, I think you would withdraw from half of the way. But persistence is the key. And dedication is very, very important.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 20:19

Persistence and dedication is important indeed, because when I look at the work you do, it's you and a group of volunteers who are just passionate about what you're doing. I think you've indicated that when you started this project, you didn't have funding. Nobody was getting paid from this project. But you still kept going, regardless, and I think there's so much to be said about that, where passion and sheer dedication can take you.

Emna Mizouni 20:50

Absolutely. I mean, again, I'm so blessed to have had that team and I still have them around me. They are still very dedicated. We had a vision that we wanted to invest, we wanted to do that. We wanted to preserve our history and work on the heritage, and especially the intangible heritage. We wanted to follow that same line, whether we had money or not, whether we had funding or not. Funding was never something that we were looking for. And at some point, it was not at all a priority. Everybody put some money from their own pocket. And it's funny, we pay taxes through our salaries, but also we pay our contribution to the community by funding our own events. And we made sure that we collaborated with people who believed in the same thing, who had the same values. And we had a lot of contribution in terms of in-kind from the community around us. People who opened their venues for us to host events, who gave us internet for free, references and books to look at, to do our, for example, MedinaPedia project. That was a Wikipedia project. What else? People who came just to deliver trainings, and not only Wikipedia, but photography and other types of things. From online safety to photography, from tour guiding to lecturing, everybody almost came for free. The only time that we charged people for money was when we rented a bus to go from city to another. But I remember for some editions, for example, for Wiki Loves Monuments, we used, we used our own cars to transport people from one city to the other to take pictures. And that was really something that you do out of love, love to the work that you're doing, out of passion. And everybody was so dedicated to that. And when you're so dedicated, people they are attracted to you. And that's what attracted the community to us.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 23:17

So for people who were like, we don't even know what they're trying to do when you started Carthagina. What kinds of reaction do you get now? Do people see the impact your work is having?

Emna Mizouni 23:32

This is a very good question. Many things change. People who are interested in joining the team, the core team that is doing the work, people who are becoming, even without approaching them, becoming our ambassadors speaking about us everywhere. Sometimes I would be working and I receive a text or a video or a picture from an event that is happening somewhere else that I have no idea about and where somebody mentions Carthagina, and is like, "This is an initiative to follow." People who are basically taking the brand of Carthagina and putting it as a recommendation to donors. Donors who are following us wherever we go, and are like, "Why don't you apply for this? We want to give you money." And it's really, really rewarding in many ways to see the growth in terms of community. The kids that started going out with us on our tours and trips that are now adolescents. This is amazing to see. They never missed an activity. Or even when they miss an activity, they come and ask about what happened. The human connections, whether it's a love story, or a professional connection through Carthagina, so the network became big. It's flourishing in a very good way. And yeah, I mean, we were considered leaders in what we're doing. We're not part of the governmental organisations or the organisation that are receiving funds from the government. But we are a key part in everything. Every time, for example, the municipality of Tunis, when they do an event, they host an event or a conference, training, Carthagina has to be there, whether we know about it or not. They will send us the information. It's like, you're a key player, we want you to be part of this, part of the conversation.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 25:40

Interesting. And I'm glad you've come this far. And I just believe that you're even going to go further. Let me move on to open and open knowledge. Why is Open Knowledge so important to you? And I think it reflects in the work you do, pretty much who you are.

Emna Mizouni 26:00

It's very important. I mean in different ways it's very important. But if we put it in a way, coming from developing countries, or coming from the Global South, we know the importance of things. We don't have the privilege that others have. We don't have the privilege of having access to good education, access to knowledge. For example, in Tunisia, some people cannot afford buying books. Unfortunately, to buy a book that is a, for example, a Tunisian book or an Arabic literature book, it costs way more than your weekly budget sometimes as a grown-up professional. I'm not talking about even young people. It's so expensive. I don't know, I was reading this yesterday from an editor. If you put the average in the world, a book would cost the same as a coffee that you grab

from a coffee shop in the Western world. Knowledge is very, very expensive for us. Data is expensive, for example. And so if we do not really make sure that there is part of that knowledge that exists somewhere, is accessible to people, we're going to be behind in everywhere. And here comes the disparity that we were talking about. It's the privilege that some people they cannot see. If they're like... it's not the bling bling that comes with the word free knowledge or open knowledge. It's the need that comes from the ground. If I am an advocate for open knowledge, I know the importance that could make the Open Knowledge and the lives of other people who do not have the same privilege. If we take some countries like in the US, for example, when you walk around and you find free libraries, like the small, small books outside of their houses, they put books for free. You take you exchange, books are affordable. If you buy a coffee for \$5, you can buy a book for \$5. Everything around this is important. It's like that's knowledge that's available. We don't have that same culture. How can we make it available? If we write about certain topics, if we pay tribute to certain people, leaders, it's very important. Unfortunately, internet was and has been for so long so white that the knowledge coming from our area of the world does not exist or is challenged. So Open Knowledge is equal negotiating for making your knowledge exist. Making sure that the richness of our knowledge that is mainly our knowledge is there documented for future generations, is important. That's really my motive for being an advocate and for working harder in this.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 29:27

When I look at your life, it appears you've been an activist all along and I guess at every point in your life, you are pulled to a particular direction but it's still activism. How did you get into activism?

Emna Mizouni 29:41

As you said, I've been my whole life an activist without even knowing it. But if you have values and you have a certain way of seeing things, and you just cannot stand things going in the wrong place, or being deprived from things or seeing injustice, I think you would be drawn to fight against that injustice. I mean, we're equal humans, you should not treat women as a secondary type of human or not citizens enough, and all of that. And, to a certain extent, I think being Tunisian helped a lot. For example, in terms of women's rights, women's rights movement in Tunisia was so advanced compared to other countries within the region, we did not have the same issues, we were ahead in certain things. But again, as I told you, in terms of culture, we have very conservative areas around the country, where I cannot be myself. And I cannot be heard because I am a woman. And that's even within my family. As an anecdote, my grandfather, which I loved and cherished so much, for him it was like certain things I cannot do because I was a woman, but I was able to convince him otherwise. And able to convince him that, no, even if I am a woman, I can do this, I can do that, and I can prove myself. And he became very proud of me because of that. So if I won my very Nomad, Bedouin patriarchal grandfather, I think that was a big move. But it's like, our own existence as

women in Africa or the Arab world is a way of resistance. You resist everything every day. You challenge, you're challenged every day. You're challenged to prove your existence in schools, you're challenged to prove your existence within the family itself, within the community. You challenge your existence to make your way through your professional career. And all of the challenges that come around... Women, they do not help most of the time, because they're in that societal bubble that they are not supposed to do this. And so how can you really do everything you want if you are not resisting, and being an activist in your own life? You either go within the bubble and accept your role in a patriarchal society, or you just decide to go against it. And that's activism. And so if I am an activist for myself and for others, speaking on behalf of others, I think there are other women who are activists in their own lives only. That's maybe the difference between me and some people, but our own existence as women is a challenge in itself. And so all of those stereotypes, and all of those practices within the society, you have to resist them. And so, by default, being a woman makes you an activist in different ways.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 33:18

Indeed, it does. So sometimes it can be a bit disheartening when other women see activists, particularly those pushing for women empowerment in a negative light. Sometimes they are tagged as men haters and all sorts of names. And in certain places, when you say you're even a feminist you looked at in a very different way. But I agree with you, like you said, being a woman, it should make you an automatic activists given the prevailing circumstances around us. So you do a lot of activism online, you are very present in the digital space. And I reckon it's not such an easy space for women. How easy has it been navigating these spaces as a woman?

Emna Mizouni 34:08

That's a very good question for two reasons. The first reason is that I am present online as much as I'm present on the ground. And that's what people they don't see. Sometimes, when they are behind their screens, they think that I am an online activist. I do online, on the ground, I participate in both, and I do a lot of work on the ground actually more than the online presence. But in terms of actually the digital presence and online activism, I think being a woman online speaking your mind makes it very hard for you. And if you're not strong enough and dedicated enough and you allow yourself some time off, you can be easily, easily harmed. Why I say that, it's not to threaten anyone or make anyone be scared, but we've seen a rise of hate speech and smear campaigns against women online that is incredible, and being part of a society that is very conservative could lead to major, major harm against women activists online. We tried, within Digital Citizenship, we tried to address that point. But we did several campaigns, like Stop Silencing Women Online, or You're Not Alone just to show women that actually they're not alone. If I speak up and I campaign online you have to be sure that I am receiving tens of messages, and either direct messages or hacking attempts, or all

of that type of the digital violence, or the online violence that you can imagine. So for example, if I am speaking on a very specific topic, I would receive death threats, I would receive insults, all type of things. And at some point that goes from just, for example, receiving those messages on Facebook or Twitter or Instagram, to actually receiving them on my regular phone. And I think I'm privileged enough to not have it cascade into real life, but we saw in real life, lots of activists, and especially through our work in that You're Not Alone campaign. A lot of activists their activism online presence and speaking up their minds, led to people attacking them in the streets, being violent against them, they were beaten in the streets. We were at the very beginning, actually, and this is how, basically we created Digital Citizenship as an initiative. I thought I was alone being targeted for what I spoke about, when I received all of those messages, like, really dirty messages that you would say, like, "Why? What did I do wrong?" And they were not coming from my own country only. They were coming from different places, insulting me, as a woman, threatening me with my family, or sending me porn pictures, sending me porn invitations.. And I would say like, why would they do that? Why am I subjected to that? And then what happened is, I met other activist women, from other countries, and they were subjected to the same actually. And so it's a matter, it's does not really, I'm not alone in this actually. Women they are targeted. And when we do research on women's existence online, it shows a lot. And we did it in the Arab world, basically. It shows that women to avoid that type of violence of hate speech online, they tend not to have their own names, real names, on their, for example, Facebook accounts, or Twitter or Instagram. They tend not to use their pictures. If it's a mother, she says, like, I'm Fulen the mother of X and she puts the picture of a heart, Allah God, or a picture of nature or picture of her son. So it's like, basically, she hides behind a virtual identity just to be there on the social media network. And those are not women activists, but generally speaking, women online. And so activism online is subject to hate speech, is subject to blackmailing and outing, doxing, is subject to nonconsensual sexting, it's subject to many, many things. And so we have to call on these things, actually, and say, "No, this is not right, you should stop it." That's part of the activism that I talk about. And so we have to call on these things, actually, and say, No, this is not right. You should stop it. That's part of the activism that I talk about.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 39:13

Yeah. And as you mentioned, women, we need to stick together and I'm glad that you found a community to know that you are not alone. I'm happy you're still standing, you haven't quit. I wanted to move to Digital Citizenship, but you've touched on that I'll continue from there. What would you say, or in what ways have women's and girl's lives improved since coming into contact with Digital Citizenship?

Emna Mizouni 39:42

I will say this is a big thing to say that women's lives improved. At least we know that we created the first seed as an initiative for getting women together. And emphasising from the early age, because the first target that we work with is the adolescent girls, the concept of sisterhood as you mentioned, that's a very important thing. And we've been trying to get them to a better online safe space. At least if the space, the general environment, is not safe and is very toxic with the hate speech and violence at least they know how to report that, at least they know how to keep themselves safe from hacking attempts. And actually, why we invested in that a lot because we saw cases of girls who were pushed to stay at home and leave school based on leaking conversations and taking pictures from hacked accounts on social media. It's like how can we stop that? How can we stop that bullying against them? And explaining to them basically the meaning of each one of them. That we touch different people, different ages was very important to build a sisterhood at an early age, which is an ongoing programme for us, but also to build it as a network of established women, not only young girls. And so working with young girls is so, so rewarding actually. And then it's very good to see, very fulfilling actually to see how girls they're eager to know. They're very smart. And if you give them the right tools that they need, and you listen to what they need from them, not assume things, that could help getting their life better. So there are plenty of things that we're trying. And basically, we're responding to their needs, as they voice them. But we're emphasising mainly the sisterhood. Because if you don't have a community, you will be left alone. You cannot move forward.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 42:10

What is that one challenge you faced consistently? And how have you managed to deal with that?

Emna Mizouni 42:19

Proving myself, proving that I am worth being there, I'm worth being at the table talking. It took me a long, long way to prove myself. Proving myself was a very painful process, proving myself as a leader in my own community. One time, someone said to me from the Carthagina community that when they knew my age, they were surprised, they felt I was a woman in my late thirties. Because of the way I behaved, I had to behave in a certain way, a very serious way to make sure that I'm respected. And my leadership is respected, that I had to be in a certain headspace and a certain way of behaving.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 43:09

And you've managed to navigate it so well that you're still here. You don't agree?

Emna Mizouni 43:16

It's not I agree, but it's a big challenge. It's still ongoing, I still have to prove myself in different ways, in different places, even to people who are part of the community. Sometimes people who do not, who see me as a threat. I'd rather be one of those invisible leaders who pushes from behind, and wants everyone within the team to be a leader in itself. Some people they see me as a threat as like, oh, she's way too much. How can we take that from her? They don't see the hard work. For example, I would give a random example. Why is she Wikimedian of the year? What did she do? They don't see the hard work behind it. They don't see the endless, long nights that I spent instead of sleeping, I would be working on certain things, doing certain things empowering communities and preparing for conferences, taking from my own leave, to attend the conference, or to organise a conference and using my own capacities and expertise and networks for that to happen. All of that is not seen. And it's a continuous challenge, basically. It's not done yet.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 44:36

Yeah, and I think this is what has festered this imposter syndrome, women occupying certain positions, and then they doubt themselves if they even deserve to be there. And sometimes it's because of comments like you just mentioned from people who don't see the hard work that you put in, but all they see is that you are in this position, and then they project these comments on you and then you start believing, okay, maybe I don't deserve to be here. Maybe I can't take up the space and do the best I can do here.

Emna Mizouni 45:08

That's very true. And what you mentioned, I mean, if Michelle Obama suffered from imposter syndrome, you can imagine the case of other women. And yeah, definitely. What saddens me is that I know I would expect it to come from men, for example. But what saddens me is when it comes from women. But I have been so blessed to have a lot of women around me in my network that would be my supporting system to push me to like, no, you're worth it, you can do that you deserve to be there. Women mentors, women friends, all of these women in my life, they really are... the type of the supporting system that I have, in addition to my own family, they really helped me in my career, they helped by suggesting to me to do certain things certain ways. And saying, like, you know, you're not alone, or you deserve this, because x and y. And if you achieved enough, if this is where you want, what's your new goal in life? All of this is like, I think it's really important for us to be in a space where we're supported, again, sisterhood, family, that type of support is very important to keep going and to overcome any type of doubt or impostor syndrome, or anything.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 46:35

And I don't know why people think that women activists can't have love or can't have men in their lives. Is it something you've experienced?

Emna Mizouni 46:47

Yes. Yes, I did experience that a lot. And yes, I have a man in my life, and I'm married. And so in love with my man. Yes, some men, they came to me as like, oh, you're too strong for men to handle. You cannot find anyone. Oh, I pity you. You're like any other woman activist that does not have anyone in her life. I keep quiet. I never said anything about it. And I think many women and throughout history, they were subject to that. It's not just activists but women leaders in general. It's like, if she's a leader, her husband or her partner is not, is not as man as he's supposed to be.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 47:35

Yeah, he's weak.

Emna Mizouni 47:35

He's weak. Exactly. But no, my husband is a very strong, man. He's very good at what he does. He's a leader himself, because he's very supportive. He understands, he's a feminist in his own way, supporting very, very much what I do, despite being from different cultures and speaking different languages, as the native or mother tongue, despite all of that he's a supportive person. So yeah, women activists, they could men in their life. They could have love relationships, whether it's a man or woman. And I think it's the same for some men activists, not all of them. But some of them. I know some of them, who are struggling to find the right woman next to them. So it's a matter, I think, of the love relationship. It's not only activism.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 48:33

Yeah, I agree. And for people who think that men who are by the side of strong women must be weak, I can't even imagine, because it will take a man who is equally strong, and who is equally a man in his own right, to be able to match a woman who is also strong, and a woman in her own right, like those energies need to match. So it's just incredible that people have this thought process concerning women leaders, activists and all that. Anyway, what kind of Tunisia would you want your child to inherit?

Emna Mizouni 49:19

I would love to have a more resilient, more stable Tunisia, the education system will get better. I hope for my children that things would be better, less of digital threats, less of stereotypes against women, and also against men. Men should not do that, should not do that. All of this, I hope that they get a better future. And I hope they love my country as much as I do love it.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 49:54

Thank you so much. Emna. It's been such a pleasure talking to you. I really enjoyed the conversation, I hope you've also enjoyed it.

Emna Mizouni 50:03

I did it was so, so good to reflect on certain thing. Thank you so much for having me.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 50:09

Emna Mizouni is founder of Carthagina and Digital Citizenship. We do wish her the very best in their advocacy for her country, especially for women and girls.

Thank you for listening to Inspiring Open, a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women. This first series of Inspiring Open was funded through the International Relief Fund for organisations in culture and education 2021, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and other partners; and an annual grant from the Wikimedia Foundation. If you enjoyed today's show, subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts so you never miss an episode. Feel free to share, rate and review us. We appreciate the support. You can also tag us in your posts. We are @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I'll leave you with the words of Ntozake Shange. "Sisterhood is important because we are all we have to stand on. We have to stand near and by each other, pray for one another and share the joys and the difficulties that women face in the world today. If we don't talk about it amongst ourselves, then we are made silent by the patriarchy. And that serves us no purpose. Until next time, look after yourselves and your sisters. And remember, be inspired, be challenged, be bold. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu and you've been listening to Wiki Loves Women, Inspiring Open.