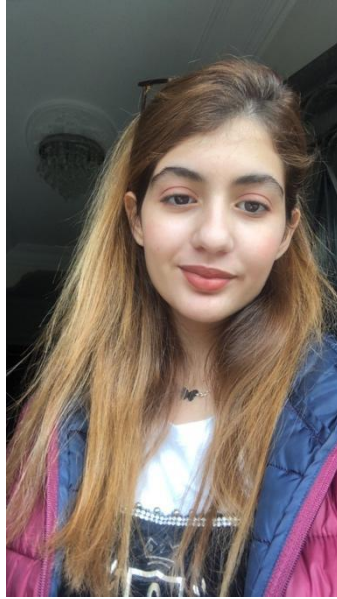


Women Leadership Digital Storytelling Project



Text by **Zineb Halifi**. Photos provided by the interviewee Fatna El Bouih

This story is part of the Women Leadership Digital Storytelling led by the Stevens Initiative in collaboration with the Faculty of Letters and Humanities Ben M'sik/ Hassan II University of Casablanca and Kennesaw State University, Atlanta.

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EmergEd from nowhere to be Fatna El Bouih



Fanta El Bouih was born in a small village named "Ben Ahmad," a small town about 80 Km east of Casablanca. Fanta El Bouih is a Moroccan feminist and a former political prisoner. She is among the pioneers of the women's cause in Morocco. She encountered difficulties in her education when she was young because at that time, girls weren't allowed to go to school. Fatna El Bouih wanted to defy herself and the social barriers, so that's why she studied so hard to get grades that were better than her brother's in order not to let her father drop her out from school. After finishing her primary and Middle school studies in her town, she had to move to Casablanca to join High School. There, Fatna El Bouih's life changed dramatically. She started to understand things around her and ask questions about her surroundings. She started to question the patriarchal Moroccan society and the power that men in general had as opposed to women who were more often than not portrayed as weak. She wondered why women could not speak out their mind when they could do that better than men. Fatna El Bouih discovered at an earlier age that women were not weak and that they were powerful, indeed. The only problem that hindered this power is the fact that women were oppressed and as such couldn't talk freely about their own problems. Therefore, Fatna El Bouih took matters in her hands and started questioning gender inequality in her society. She was arrested defending women's cause for the first time when she was only 18 years old. She was kidnapped, imprisoned, and treated so badly. Her book, *Talks of Darkness*, describes how she was treated while in prison and what she endured. The book also describes with more details all her life.



After she was released from prison, Fatna El Bouih started her first job as a teacher. She taught for 20 years, then stopped teaching to free herself to defend women's cause within the framework of associations concerned with the issue. She is currently a project coordinator within an association called "احياء العالم" (World Neighbors) whose primary objective is to deal with gender issues and women's rights. The association has an office in Rabat and other chapters in many countries in Africa, Europe and Latin America. Fatna El Bouih invented a game named *تلعبوها مساواة* (Let's Play Equality Game). The game enables students to know about the history of women in their country in order to unveil their accomplishments. The game shows some pictures of famous Moroccan women and Arab women from other countries, too. It also talks about their achievement at a very specific time and place.





The picture by Helene Harder.

Fatna El Bouih faced a lot of challenges in her life, but the only challenge that sticks in her mind is when she got kidnapped and imprisoned and no one knew about her. She had to face her destiny and endure all the pain and maltreatment. She suffered a lot and had to face so many hurdles in her life and despite all of that she feels stronger and more determined than before to fight injustice

Poverty and the harsh reality that Fatna El Bouih endured as a woman allowed her to make her way and life to what she has become now. She is an example of a powerful woman who has succeeded in overcoming the problems she faced in her life, a courage that made her stand still and firm. Fatna El Bouih always thanks her late father because without him she would never be able to become what she is now. Her father was a man of honor. He was a teacher and everyone respected him in the village. When she was first arrested, he stood by her side and supported her until his last days in life even though he knew that society would talk bad about his imprisoned daughter. Fatna El Bouih gets inspired by Fatima El Mernissi and her ideas about feminism. As a leader, Fatna El Bouih always encourages other women to fight for their rights and study because knowledge is the key to women's success.