

Girls' Secondary Education and Empowerment in the Atlas Mountains (now named Education and Empowerment in the High Atlas Mountains: Love, Dreams and Development's Promise).

In October 2022 I was able to commence six months of fieldwork in rural Al Haouz, a region in the High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, with the support of funds from BILNAS. My research, which traces the lives of 51 girls' post-high school since 2019, problematizes Western-centric development discourse around girls' empowerment. I argue that we need to rethink Eurocentric notions that empowerment unfolds along a universal, linear pathway, and I instead take a more holistic and qualitative approach to thinking about women's empowerment, disempowerment and empowerment pathways.

I completed by BILNAS-funded fieldwork in March 2023 and upon returning to Oxford, I subsequently received an additional fieldwork grant, allowing me to return Morocco for an additional 12 months. During my fieldwork, I was able to conduct 57 in-depth, semi structured life history interviews with girls, which involved me walking on foot to over 40 remote villages in the High Atlas. I also carried out hundreds of hours of participant observation in different villages.

I presented my research at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) conference in Denver, USA in December 2022, with a paper entitled: Education and Empowerment: Girls' Education in the High Atlas Mountains.

On 8th September 2023, an earthquake struck Al Haouz, with its epicentre directly in the middle of my fieldsite. Given my in-depth knowledge of this remote, mountainous area, my language skills (in Tachelhit) and my part-time position as Development Officer for the British Moroccan Society, I found myself unexpectedly coordinating and leading the British-Moroccan earthquake relief efforts. I was responsible for leading the relief program which involved mapping of village needs and the organization of daily aid distribution convoys in collaboration with local communities. I set up and led an aid mapping system for the major organizations working on the ground which mapped 1,665 aid drops in 839 affected villages. This incredibly challenging experience of building and leading a humanitarian effort was a result of the fieldwork I completed, with the support of BILNAS.

The earthquake had a significant impact on my fieldsite, fieldwork and research. Several of my research participants passed away, and the villages where I was previously working were destroyed. I was also deeply impacted by the earthquake on a personal level. I faced challenges in continuing my research, however since the earthquake, I have managed to finish my fieldwork and subsequently published an article in the Journal of North Africa Studies entitled 'Reflections on the Al Haouz earthquake and our place as ethnographers in times of crisis.' Although this was not the original article I

planned on submitting as a publishable outcome from my BILNAS grant, it is a reflection of my fieldwork experiences and the circumstances of my research.

I was invited as a guest lecturer to give a talk at Al Akhawayn University in Morocco entitled 'Education, Empowerment and Changing Marriage Dynamics in Rural Al Haouz,' based on my fieldwork.

I expect to submit my DPhil thesis in early 2025, and I have acknowledged the funding received from BILNAS in my thesis Acknowledgements.

I would like to extend my thanks to BILNAS for supporting my work in rural Morocco, which I hope to continue as a post doctorate scholar after finishing my DPhil.

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