



Nov 08, 2022 14:49 GMT

Stories of strength – academic awarded prestigious Philip Leverhulme Prize for research into Sahrawi women's resistance

The experiences of Sahrawi women peacefully protesting the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara will be recorded as part of a new project by a Northumbria University academic.

[Dr Joanna Allan](#) has been awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize worth £100,000 to carry out the research, which will explore the lives of four women and their participation in nonviolent resistance movements against colonialism and occupation.

Dr Allan hopes her work will raise global awareness of Western Sahara's occupation which, due to restrictions by the Moroccan authorities on journalists and human rights activists entering the country, has lacked media coverage.

Her research will also explore the role natural resources have played in ongoing political and environmental conflicts in North Africa and Spain, specifically phosphates, which are used as fertilizer in food production around the world.

Philip Leverhulme Prizes are awarded by the Leverhulme Trust to researchers at an early stage of their careers whose work has had international impact and whose future research career is exceptionally promising.

With more than 300 nominations for this year, Dr Allan is one of just 30 academics chosen to receive a [2022 Philip Leverhulme Prize](#).

Speaking about her research she said: "I am deeply grateful and honoured to have been selected by the Leverhulme Trust for this prize. The funding will have a transformational impact on my work, allowing me to take my research on women's anti-colonial resistance and environmental justice in new directions."

Dr Allan will undertake two projects as part of her research. The first will be a biography following the experiences of four women from Western Sahara who have spent their lives campaigning for their country's independence through non-violent resistance to Moroccan occupation.

She explains: "There is increasing research on how women have participated in nonviolent resistance movements against colonialism, occupation, and war. However, we know little about how such cultural activists attempt to change the 'hearts and minds' of the people their protests are aimed at. I hope to expand such knowledge through the Four Women project, as well as to contribute to the theorisation of culture's role in nonviolent movements globally."

The second project will explore different cultural understandings of 'environmental justice' and what these mean for transforming the global food system. It will focus specifically on cultural representations of phosphates in

the literature and oral traditions of Northwest Africa and Spain.

Dr Allan is a member of [Northumbria University's Centre for International Development](#).

Speaking about her success, [Centre Co-Director Professor Katy Jenkins](#) said: “We are delighted that Dr Allan’s innovative research has been recognised with this prestigious award. Her internationally significant research makes an important contribution to the Centre for International Development’s cutting-edge interdisciplinary research on environmental activism and resistance in the global South.”

[Professor John Woodward](#), Pro Vice-Chancellor for Northumbria’s Faculty of Engineering and Environment added: “The Philip Leverhulme Awards recognise outstanding researchers with promising careers ahead of them. Dr Allan’s selection from such a strong field of candidates is impressive recognition of her excellent contribution and is a clear sign of the ever-growing body of excellent research and world-class researchers we have here at Northumbria University.”

Speaking about the Philip Leverhulme Prize, Professor Anna Vignoles, Director of the Leverhulme Trust, said: “In its twenty-first year, this scheme continues to attract applications from an array of researchers of an incredibly high calibre, and the decisions get harder every year.

“The Leverhulme Trust is delighted to award prizes to academics undertaking work on an impressively wide range of topics, from robotics to Romans, labour markets to Black British literature, and greenhouse gases to disability and wellbeing. We are very proud to support these researchers through the next stage of their careers.”

Dr Allan is a member of Northumbria University’s [Department of Geography and Environmental Sciences](#). Northumbria was recently ranked second in the UK for research power in Geography and Environmental Studies, with over 90% of research outputs rated as world-leading or internationally excellent in the 2021 Research Excellence Framework.

Find out more about [Northumbria University's Centre for International Development](#) and [Faculty of Engineering and Environment](#)

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