

# Undergraduate Thesis Prospectus

## Go On Grounds

Imider, a Moroccan village, challenges one of the largest silver mines in Africa

by

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On my honor as a university student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments.

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## **General research problem: How can vulnerable groups organize for self-protection**

*How can vulnerable groups protect themselves?* Knowing basic self-defense and disengagement procedures can help you avoid violence and feel more confident. Be conscious of your surroundings and call for help or go to a populated location if you feel unsafe. Regarding what is happening in Imider, the groups draw men, women, and children from the seven villages comprising Imider. They meet twice a week to assess the community's situation and strategies. The camp holds regular general crowds using the Agraw system, an ancient model of Amazigh democratic tribal governance. From this process, villagers established a negotiating committee in 2011 to speak with representatives, which is a kind of self-protection. This also can cover spam calls; people need to protect themselves from these calls.

## **Technical Research Project: Go On Grounds**

Especially on university campuses, walking is a practical mode of mobility. At night, however, walking students may be vulnerable to threats. In the technical project, a means was developed by which students can quickly and easily locate walkers who can share much of the same route. The app thereby promotes group walking, which is safer than isolated walking.

## **Sociotechnical Research Project: How did the Movement on Road 96 in Morocco fight for their rights?**

*How did residents of the Moroccan village of Imider challenge the owners?* The Imider mine is located on the northern slope of Mount Sagro, near the village of Imider in Tinghir, and is the first silver mine in Morocco and the tenth in Africa. Its exploitation began in the Middle Ages, between the 8th and 12th centuries, i.e., between the Idrisid and Almohad eras, as evidenced by coins made of silver. It produces between 14 and 15 tons of silver per month. In comparison, annually, it creates an average of 200 tons of pure silver destined for export to Europe, especially France and Switzerland, where it is used in the film industry and the pharmaceutical industry, jewelry, silverware, coins, and medals (Machishi, 2019). This mine is located on the lands of Imider Tinghir, which lives in poverty and does not differ from the rest of the Moroccan villages in anything, the identical mud houses and the same lifestyle that depends on agriculture and grazing to meet the requirements of life. This type of exploitation can be called neo-colonialism. The Imider Mine is operated by La Societe Metallurgique d'Imider (SMI) and owned by Societe Nationale d'Investissement (SNI), a private holding company owned by the Moroccan royal family. It is Africa's most productive silver mine, helping to make Morocco the 15th-biggest silver producer in the world (Bouhmouch & Bailey, 2015).

Despite the many positive advantages that characterize the dynamism and work of the Imider Mines Company, such as the critical numbers that it achieves nationally and internationally, in terms of productivity and labor. The aspirations of the local population and its social and economic demands remain prominent in their daily lives in front of local officials. Regarding management, there are many outstanding issues related to regional development and

improving the living conditions of the population in the region. Since the summer of 2011, the sit-ins of the residents have continued. They have continued until now, in Jabal Alban, denouncing the attrition policy of its natural, mineral, and human resources, without tangible equity for the people, within the framework of a set of historical contracts that the residents say. Through it, it was not respected, which made the residents of the neighboring districts rise and protest under the banner of “The Movement Road 96”, announcing a comprehensive file of demands, including social and economic (Rachidi, 2017). Road 96 began when 30 university students among a group of 70 who relied on summer jobs at the mine were not recruited to work. While protesting for more jobs, a couple of women brought empty water containers and denounced the lack of water in the villages. More women came in, joined by unemployed youths, hastening the creation of the movement. Initially, they wanted to organize a march in September 2011 to protest against the lack of jobs at mine; however, with the summer water crisis, environmental demands became their focus (Rachidi, 2017).

The water used by this company comes from this village, and activist Moha Tauja, one of the youths who organized the protest Road 96, said, "The residents are impatient with the promises every year, and in 2011 we decided to sit and close the main water well in the face of the company exploiting the mine" which means draining the water mattress and causing pollution, according to him. The residents had access to water only one hour a day in 2011, Tawja said. But after they closed the valve, the situation went back to normal in their villages. "The water levels went up in the wells of the farms and the khettaras ancient traditional underground networks (Rachidi, 2017). According to a September 2015 report by the Global Amazigh Congress, an international organization focused on the rights of Amazigh minorities, the mine uses 1,555 cubic meters of water per day, 12 times the village's daily consumption. A

report issued by INNOVAR, an independent hydrogeological group based in Temara, Morocco, found that the mine has had a devastating impact on Imider's khattara system, a traditional underground canal network that has supplied water to farmers in the desert area since the 14th century (Bouhmouch & Bailey, 2015). "We are the indigenous people of this land," protester Hamid Battou told Al Jazeera. "And even though we have silver and all these minerals and resources around us, we don't benefit from them." Imider residents are primarily ethnic Amazigh's, more than half of whom live on less than a dollar daily. On the other hand, the company said they contributed to the region's development, "notably in terms of infrastructure, with construction in Tinghir." SMI's construction projects include "a health center, a mosque, a cultural center, a nursery, sporting areas and housing for 300 families", along with the expansion of local schools, according to Managem's website (Bouhmouch & Bailey, 2015). However, the Imider activists say these contributions are insignificant and do not benefit their village. Instead, they say the primary beneficiaries are the mine workers, who were brought from cities and resided in Tinghir, a large town to the east of Imider.

The movement on Road 96 has expressed concerns about toxic waste from the mine and its impact on water and health. But the company publicly said there is no risk and toxic materials are recycled in basins. But a 2013 investigation led by the Moroccan Association of Investigative Journalism (AMJI) found that the concentration of harmful elements such as arsenic, cobalt, cadmium, and lead often exceeded international standards in the Imider region. No medical study has yet been conducted to determine whether there is a relationship between these diseases and the toxic materials in Imider's soil and water. Moha Tawja, one of the village's residents and a member of the movement, said, "If we had independent studies that can prove the effectiveness of the mine on Imider, I don't think we would need to protest." (Bouhmouch & Bailey, 2015). In

the same context, activists of Road 96 were subjected to a series of arbitrary arrests, resulting from successive protest marches and stops, which in total ranged from two to four years, and on serious charges (obstruction of works; unauthorized gatherings...), but the residents did not give up despite the arrests. Instead, it remained steadfast in the face of what it described as intransigence, oppression, and marginalization, clinging to its legitimate rights in employment, health, and education (Machishi, 2019).

To introduce their cause, they filmed a movie called "Amoso" with the help of director Nader Bouhamouche. This film is a form of struggle that conveys the struggle and realities of the movement (Amoso, 2019). It was said about "Amoso" that it is a unique and rare experience, being the product of a social protest movement. This has never happened in Africa, and perhaps the experiences of the indigenous peoples of Latin America and Australia are the most prominent similar experiences. This is what makes the "Alban" protesters happy, who commented about this unique experience, saying: "We are pleased with this, and we hope that it will be repeated many times in all parts of the world." (Ait Ali, 2019). Finally, it can be said that the Imider mine remains an important national and international mineral heritage if there is indeed thought to find objective and sound solutions to the various pests facing the population to ensure the course of human life and serve local development at multiple levels.

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