

## ETHICS

# Activist Ethics: the Need for a Nuanced Approach to Resistance Studies Field Research

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### *Abstract*

*There is little existing research on the ethical issues facing researchers amongst resistance activists in conflict settings. This paper engages this research gap using the case study of field research amongst resistance activists in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara. It argues that fieldwork amongst activists resisting authoritarian regimes involves unique ethical challenges. Researchers and academic institutions must overcome these challenges if Resistance Studies is to continue to flourish as a discipline. Sometimes, this paper contends, the most ethical way to surmount said challenges necessitates undermining some of the traditional plinths of academic ethical frameworks. The paper makes two further, interlinked arguments: firstly, research amongst resistance activists demands a highly-nuanced and politically-aware approach with regards to ethical considerations. Secondly, however, the researcher under review can only demand such flexible treatment if she is prepared to actively contribute to the resistance struggle that she studies. This is because an activist standpoint is the only ethical response, the paper argues, to the particular ethical challenges associated with researching resistance to an authoritarian regime. In summary, we need an understanding of activist ethics from researchers.*

### **Introduction**

‘You’ll never get that past the Ethical Review Committee,’ one classmate told me in our Research Ethics course. Another concluded, ‘You’ll just