

# Social Movements and Resistance Studies in Neoliberal Times

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## *Abstract*

*This article looks at the issues that the study of resistance and social movements raises to applied normative ethics in the context of neoliberal academia. In particular, by focusing on the function of ethics review committees, the article discusses how current ethics guidelines can constitute possible methodological impediments for the practice of participatory action research. Furthermore, the article reflects on the current institutional principlist approach to ethics and how this has a potential to silence socially engaged research. The article goes further to argue that, with the shift of tertiary education from public good to a corporate service, ethics committees function as bodies that contribute to implement neoliberal governmentalising and individualising techniques among academics. Neoliberal discourses have, indeed, permeated academic institutions with potentially serious consequences for the study of resistance and social movements.*

## **Introduction**

On February 3, 2016, the body of Giulio Regeni was found in a ditch alongside the highway between Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt. His body showed signs of extreme torture: numerous fractured bones, stab wounds, burns and a broken neck that ultimately caused his death. Giulio was an Italian PhD student at the University of Cambridge researching independent trade unionism in Egypt, where he was conducting his fieldwork when he was allegedly kidnapped and killed. This tragic event has sparked numerous discussions in the academic circles around issues of safety and risks for researchers in the field, and around neoliberal discourses of risk assessment, responsibility and protection.

In this piece, I will address the critical aspect of research ethics for