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

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Abstract

There is little research on the ethical issues facing researchers amongst resistance activists in conflict settings. The 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 treatment 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.

Main text

'You'll never get *that* past the Ethical Review Committee,' one classmate told me in our Research Ethics course. Another concluded, 'you'll just have to lie on the forms.' 'If you have to do the fieldwork undercover, it's not really academic research,' opined another. During the first few months of my PhD, I attended every course I could find on fieldwork, the ethical aspects of research and ethical review processes. I read copies of approved Ethical Review forms lent by helpful colleagues. I skyped with generous academics that had realised field research similar to what I planned. But still, I wondered if my PhD project would be possible at all, taking into account the ethical dilemmas that my envisaged fieldwork brought. I could not shush my anxieties by reading past research on dealing with the ethical issues specific to a

research context like mine, because, as far as I knew at that time, that research did not exist.

If there is scant research on the ethics of fieldwork in conflict and post-conflict settings (Campbell 2010, 1), there is less still on the ethical issues facing researchers that focus on the lives of resistance activists in such settings. And yet such research is arguably integral to creating a more humane society (Vinthagen 2015). My paper engages this research gap. In it, I argue that fieldwork amongst activists resisting authoritarian regimes involves unique ethical challenges. Researchers and academic institutions must respond to these challenges if Resistance Studies is to continue to flourish as a discipline. Sometimes, I contend, the most ethical way to overcome said challenges necessitates undermining some of the plinths of what is traditionally regarded as ethical academic research ('traditional' in the sense that they are routinely referred to in the paperwork of academic ethical review forms and guidance). 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, I argue, to the particular ethical challenges associated with the context I describe. We need an understanding of *activist ethics* from researchers and institutions alike.

To make these arguments, I draw on personal experience of fieldwork amongst activists resisting an authoritarian regime. My most recent research project focused on the relationship between resistance to authoritarian regimes and constructions of gender and gender equality in Western Sahara and Equatorial Guinea from the last years of the Spanish colonial period until today. Whilst I made use of archival data and literary sources, my methodology also drew on multi-stranded strategies from the social sciences, including in-depth interviews, oral histories and participant observation. Therefore, the project has involved field research amongst resistance

activists in various countries.[1] In this paper, I focus on the period of field research that brought with it the most gnawing ethical dilemmas: occupied Western Sahara.[2]

With regards to the structure of the paper, I begin with a brief background to the Western Sahara conflict and my experiences with the Ethical Review Committee of my institution followed by an overview of the theoretical approach that I used for my field research. Next, I turn my attention to the ethical challenges faced, and I focus on those that are particular to my research context within Resistance Studies, paying less attention to dilemmas that are already debated across several disciplinary fields, such as informed consent, power relations between the researcher and the researched, and the blinkers that privilege brings (although I do discuss the issue of privilege in relation to risk).[3]

Conducting field research amongst activists resisting the Moroccan occupation in Western Sahara inevitably puts participants at risk of repercussions from the authorities. Therefore, I firstly address the question of participant risk. I then focus on the issue of state permissions and the ethics of lying to authorities. Thirdly I explore the subject of putting myself 'at risk.' Finally, I discuss the act of not

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[1] Over 2013-2016, I undertook fieldwork in Equatorial Guinea, Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara, Morocco, Spain and Algeria. I also drew on previous fieldwork undertaken in POLISARIO-controlled Western Sahara in 2006 and Algeria in 2006 and 2008.

[2] I refer to the Moroccan-administered part of Western Sahara as occupied rather than as disputed. This is not just because the word 'disputed' implies that the claims of the Moroccan invaders are just as valid as those of the Saharawis (such wording has the affect of legitimizing the expansion of a country's territory by force, a clear violation of the UN Charter), but also because 'occupied' is the legally correct way to describe the territory (Kontorovich 2015, 611-612, Mundy 2007, Saul 2015). Stephen Zunes has highlighted how France and the USA have gradually altered mainstream understanding of Western Sahara as from 'occupied' to 'disputed' (Zunes 2015, 290). Morocco seeks to accelerate this progressive change. For example, in 2016 it expelled MINURSO peacekeepers in retaliation at Ban Ki Moon describing the territory as 'occupied' (see http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/ban-ki-moon-demands-western-sahara-mission-be-fully-restored-1606934184, accessed 30 January 2017). The gravest issue with such a change in language is the legal implications. A 'disputed' territory is not subject to all the clauses of Geneva Convention treaties and protocols that an 'occupied' territory is. For example, as Zunes says, in a 'disputed' Western Sahara it would not be illegal for Morocco to move settlers into the territory, or for Morocco to sell the territory's natural resources (Zunes 2015, 290).

[3] I did, of course, consider all these issues and others in my Ethical Review documents, and planned my fieldwork with such concerns in mind.

maintaining anonymity of research participants. I approach each of these issues from a feminist (and therefore activist) standpoint, and by doing so, it is possible to argue for the ethical validity of risks, half-truths and lack of anonymity. However, in arguing that a feminist and activist approach validates and indeed necessitates undermining some ethical codes that are usually unquestioned, I must also delineate exactly how said activist approach can be practiced. In the final section of my paper, therefore, I explore the suitability of various activist approaches to research.

Background to research context

In 1975, when the dictator of Spain, Francisco Franco lay on his deathbed, his government contravened the UN call for self-determination of the Saharawi people and sold the then Spanish colony of Western Sahara to Morocco and Mauritania in exchange for revenue from the country's natural resources for Spain. Spain had been the colonial ruler of Western Sahara since the late 19th century. The POLISARIO Front, the guerrilla movement of the Saharawi natives of Western Sahara, led the struggle against the invading Moroccans and Mauritanians whilst civilians formed refugee camps in neighbouring Algeria. These camps are currently home to an estimated 175,000 refugees and constitute the POLISARIO's state-in-exile. Meanwhile, the portion of the population that did not manage to escape in 1975 live under a Moroccan occupation, separated from the refugees in Algeria and the small POLISARIO-controlled region of Western Sahara by the longest active military wall in the world.

Whilst there are a number of studies focusing on constructions of gender and gender relations in the Saharawi refugee camps of Algeria (Allan 2008, 2010, 2014, Almenara Niebla 2016, Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2013, Juliano 1998, Lippert 1992, Solana 2011, Tortajada 2004), similar academic studies on Saharawi society in the occupied territories are scarce. It is a quick and simple process to gain access to carry out

research in the POLISARIO-controlled refugee camps,[4] but this is far from the case in the occupied part. Although in recent years, the Moroccan government has encouraged tourism in Dakhla, in the south of Western Sahara, for an annual music festival as well as kite surfing opportunities, tourists in other parts are likely to be monitored to ensure that they do not talk to Saharawi nationalists. Calling the territory 'Western Sahara,' rather than 'southern Morocco,' is another sign that may lead authorities to confront tourists and possibly expel them.[5] Indeed, a factor in explaining why Western Sahara is one of the most unknown conflicts in the world is the largely successful media blockade that the Moroccan regime has maintained over Western Sahara. Although Saharawis, since the mid 2000s, have taken advantage of the growing availability of internet, mobile telephones and other technologies to chip away at this blockade themselves and communicate their struggle externally (Deubel 2015), foreign journalists wishing to talk to Saharawi nationalists are frequently expelled from the territory. The same can be said for solidarity activists, politicians and academics. These access problems are of central importance when considering the ethics of field research in occupied Western Sahara, as will become clearer later in this paper.

I am able to write this paper precisely because my university allowed me the freedom to carry out my envisaged fieldwork. At first sight, my plans contradicted some of the plinths of the university's ethical framework for research, namely openness, anonymity, risk and authority permissions. However, content with the ethical judgments I had made and the reasoning behind them the Committee 'passed' my plans. Nevertheless, literature focused on university ethical policies and Review Committees suggests that my case was as unusual as it was fortunate (Burr 2010, 129, Ceci 1985, De Gruchy 2001, Urbano, this issue). This makes me concerned about my ability to carry out similar research in the future at other universities.

[4] It has been my personal experience that obtaining a visa from the Algerian embassy and permission from the POLISARIO to conduct research in the camps is easy and quick to do. I have always been free to go wherever and talk to whomever I wish, even after having written and published articles that are critical of the POLISARIO in some ways.

[5] Conversations with Europeans that have visited Western Sahara as tourists, without the intention of engaging with Saharawi nationalists, October and November 2014.

Below I argue that conforming to calls for openness, anonymity, risk and authority permissions may not always be the most ethical option when it comes to Resistance Studies research, especially from a feminist perspective, which demands an activist commitment to the (sociopolitical) issues one studies.

Feminist research methodologies raise important questions concerning the problems of reproducing power relations in fieldwork, the inevitability of 'taking sides' in research and how to do so in way that is morally or politically sound, and the question of whose voice and knowledge is conveyed in a paper (Barrett 1996). A feminist methodology also demands that research not be undertaken for its own sake but rather to counter oppression (Barrett 1996). As Diane Wolf puts it, 'any truly feminist research must involve some kind of change through activism and consciousness-raising' (Wolf 1996, 5). In this sense, feminist research overlaps with activist research more generally, in that it must go further than cultural critique (that is, research that is concerned with unequal power relations but stops short of demanding action from the researcher) and ensure active involvement in political struggle for change (Hale 2006). Feminist afroepistemology in particular demands that knowledge be produced to liberate, empower and foster resistance (Gabo Ntseane 2011, 313, Hill Collins 2000, Mazama 2001). Research must have an emancipatory aim. Furthermore, knowledge production must take into account an ethics of care. Emotion is central to the research process. For example, if an interviewee feels that a researcher *cares* about her plight and feels *compassion*, she will share her experiences more openly (Hill Collins 2000). Feminists reject that a researcher can be neutral, or that research can ever be embarked upon for a politically neutral motive. For that reason, the use of the first person perspective and authorial voice is encouraged. In summary, feminist researchers have social and political responsibilities when it comes to their research and research participants, and this must be taken into consideration at the ethical review stage of research. I took such a feminist (and therefore activist) approach to my research project and, as mentioned above, I write this paper on ethical challenges from such a standpoint (Gabo Ntseane 2011, Hill Collins 2000, Mazama 2001, Whittaker 1994, Wolf 1996).

Next, I explore the four key ethical dilemmas that I encountered during the research project in question, beginning with my entry into occupied El Aaiún city where I potentially put participants at risk.

Ethical Dilemmas

Dilemma I: Participant risk

A man's portrait swings on a string from the rear-view mirror.

It's El Wali, founder of the POLISARIO and national hero. Who else would it be?

His resolute expression stares out to the desert in black and white. Shueta, the charismatic singer of Saharawi band *Tiris*, belts out an upbeat number about revolution through the speakers.

The two young men sing along joyfully, the driver tapping his fingers to the beat on the window frame, the passenger taking a snap of the legally-questionable SIEMENS windfarm to his left (Western Sahara Resource Watch 2016). Meanwhile, I lie under the dashboard on the passenger side, weaved inelegantly around Saleh's legs, terrified that the police might have noted the men's number plate. What would happen to them if so?

Abdelhay doesn't seem worried. 'Everything they [the Moroccan authorities] could do has been done to us already. It's impossible to feel fear anymore' (Allan, August - September 2014).

Such sentiments would not have been surprising to Gene Sharp, a founding father of Nonviolent Resistance Studies, who has illustrated how participation in a nonviolent resistance movement gradually erodes activists' fear of an authoritarian regime's sanctions, thereby greatly denting one of a regime's key sources of power (Sharp 2013). But Saharawis' lack of fear does not necessarily make it ethically acceptable that I put them at risk. We make it to my host's (an old friend) house with no one

stopping us. The police, thankfully, must have missed the sight of Abdelhay and Saleh picking me up.

So what *would* have happened if Saleh and Abdelhay had been caught giving me a lift across the border to a well-known Saharawi activist's house? And what would have happened if police had caught me in the latter? In the seventies, eighties and nineties, punishment for talking to foreigner about the situation in Western Sahara could warrant imprisonment, torture and/or forced disappearance. Nowadays, the sanctions are not so extreme, yet they are still shocking. In February 2014, the Driver of a UK parliamentary delegation had his car impounded by Moroccan police for taking the British politicians to a Saharawi anti-occupation demonstration (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara April 2014, 13). In April 2015, the home of Saharawi activist Aminatou Haidar was attacked by Moroccan police (who threw rocks through the window) as she hosted three representatives of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) inside.[6] In May 2015, before receiving me, my host family welcomed a Polish guest who was writing a literary reportage about the Saharawi people. My host and his guest were taken to the police station for questioning, yet the visitor was allowed to stay as long as he did not meet with any other Saharawi activists.[7]

On the other hand, visits from foreigners do not always, or only, result in negative repercussions. Some activist informants explained to me that having friends abroad, particularly in some Western countries viewed as influential on the international scene, can result in increased immunity: if Moroccan authorities have reason to believe that a Saharawi has contacts abroad that could lobby on her behalf in the case of mistreatment, police are less inclined to punish her brutally. In Saleh and Abdelhay's view, assisting me brought neither notable risks nor extra immunity. They explained that whatever repercussion they could potentially face for helping an unwelcome foreigner enter Western Sahara would be no worse than what they

[6] See https://www.frontlinedefenders.org/en/node/863 [accessed 30 January 2017].

[7] He did so secretly, and indeed his book (in Polish) *All the Grains of Sand* has since been published and nominated for several awards.

would face anyway after next week's protest, or next month's sit-in, and so on infinitely as long as their political activities continue.[8] My visit could cause no additional harm to what my hosts and helpers would suffer anyway.

A key principle of my institution's ethical policy is that researchers 'do no harm.' I did no *additional* harm. Does that make my risk-inducing presence ethically acceptable? A textbook University Ethical Review may well find that it does not. And yet Resistance Studies research in some cases not only justifies the breaking of standard monoliths of academic ethical guidance but also requires said breaking *for ethical reasons*. These reasons, as we shall see, are tied up with the nonviolent strategy of the Saharawi anti-occupation activists. To understand these fully, we should first understand how the aforementioned 'loss of fear' of Moroccan sanctions came about. I attempt to explain this below by taking a historical approach to the Moroccan occupation and Saharawi resistance to it.

Since Morocco and Mauritania first invaded Western Sahara in 1975 (Mauritania made peace with the POLISARIO in 1979 and formerly recognized the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, which currently exists in exile as a nation-in-waiting (San Martín 2010) in the refugee camps of Algeria) there has been a nonviolent nationalist resistance movement led by Saharawi civilians living in the Occupied Territories.[9]

Over the last four decades, Saharawi activists have launched several open and public uprisings, each one opening up further demands and incorporating more members of the local population. Whilst a 1999 intifada focused on human rights and socioeconomic demands with nationalist demands still perceived too dangerous to

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[8] With reference to her fieldwork amongst pro-democracy activists in Malaysia, Sandra Smeltzer makes similar observations. She says, 'interactions with some Malaysians may raise (additional) red flags with the authorities about their political endeavours. Many interviewees are well aware of the risks associated with their pursuits and have, to varying degrees, made the decision to accept such liabilities. Talking to me at a coffee shop is not nearly as contentious as the majority of their other daily activities' (Smeltzer 2012, 260).

[9] For more on the dynamics of the nonviolent struggle see Stephan and Mundy (2006) and for the reasons for pursuing a nonviolent rather than a violent struggle, see Porges and Leuprecht (2016).

voice openly, the 2005 one was explicitly pro-independence (Barca and Zunes 2009, Mundy 2011, Stephan and Mundy 2006, Zunes and Mundy 2010). The most recent uprising, the 2010 Gdeim Izik protest camp (Gómez Martín 2012, Wilson 2013 and Murphy 2013), was the largest in Saharawi history, involving an estimated 20,000 people.

Saharawis that took part in the Gdeim Izik camp highlight that one of the most important effects of the protest was 'the loss of all fear' amongst Saharawi activists (Allan, August - September 2014). Activist Nguia El Haouasi explains that this is because of the indiscriminate repression that followed Gdeim Izik: every household saw a family member injured (El Haouasi, 26 November 2014). Saharawis' reaction to such violence was to become more public and brazen in their resistance. The huge levels of repression,[10] which Saharawis crucially link to a general loss of fear, served to widen the demographics of protesters more than even the previous intifadas had managed. In this regard, another activist Izana Amidan further explains, 'after Gdeim Izik, more older men began to protest. They hadn´t done so up until this point, because they were afraid of losing their employment' (22 August 2014). As Gene Sharp argues, despotism could not exist if it did not have fear at its foundation, and indeed it is not sanctions themselves that produce obedience, but rather the *fear* of sanctions. Sharp says, '[c]asting off fear is closely tied to gaining confidence that one possesses power and can act in effective ways to change a situation' (Sharp 1973, 457).

If we understand the collective casting off of fear following the incidents of 2010 in Sharp's terms, then unprecedented numbers of the Saharawi people will be armed with renewed hope and confidence, the enemy of despotism. This 'loss of fear' has important consequences when Saharawis consider the risks of meeting with foreign visitors including researchers, and therefore for ethical imperatives. Although supporting and meeting with researchers may lead to regime sanctions, Saharawi activists' loss of fear of these sanctions reduces the power of the regime.

[10] For more on the repression of the camp see Sahara Thawra, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch (respectively 2012, December 2010, 2010).

We must also consider the future of the Saharawi struggle as a whole when weighing up ethical decisions. Scholars of nonviolent resistance struggles have identified the sources of power, pillars of support, mechanisms of change and tactics that can serve as weapons for resistance movement activists (Merriman 2009). The extent to which a movement depends on each of these weapons changes according to the context. Whereas strikes, for example, have proved to be an effective tactic in various resistance struggles, such a tool is of little use to Saharawis since they are heavily outnumbered by Moroccan settlers (who could replace strikers) in their own country (Stephan 2006, 21-22). On the other hand, undermining the legitimacy of the Moroccan regime by exposing its violence is a key, if not the key, weapon of the Saharawi nonviolent anti-occupation movement. This could attract the support of international civil society, which was so integral to the success of the East Timorese anti-occupation project and indeed to the end of apartheid in South Africa. It could also convert some corners of Moroccan civil society to support the Saharawi viewpoint.[11]

If exposing the brutality of the Moroccan occupation is a main aim of the resistance movement, then witnesses are necessarily implied. Yet in Western Sahara, as mentioned above, international media is scarce, perhaps in part due to a lack of knowledge and interest in the Western Sahara case, but also because Moroccan authorities regularly harass foreign journalists attempting to cover events in Western Sahara.[12] In the absence of the international media, then, other possible witnesses, such as researchers for human rights NGOs, solidarity activists and academics become potential conduits that Saharawi nonviolent activists can use. Supporting foreigners to visit Western Sahara has become (especially since 'the loss of fear') in itself, an act of resistance for Saharawis, and, for the visitors, an

[11] Indeed, Stephen Zunes and Jacob Mundy have powerfully argued that converting Moroccan civil society and garnering the support of international civil society are the two most important tasks for Saharawi independence activists (Zunes 2010).

[12] See for example the report of Democracy Now journalists, on their 2016 visit to occupied Western Sahara, https://www.democracynow.org/2016/11/24/repression_and_nonviolent_resistance_in_africa [accessed 31 January 2017].

opportunity to support the nonviolent cause. For example, Spanish solidarity group *Sahara Thawra* aims to send a constant stream of activists to the occupied zone, so that there is always a Spanish witness to regime atrocities.[13] Similarly, the Norwegian Support Committee for Western Sahara helped to facilitate, in January 2016, the collective visit of some 68 youth politicians, students and solidarity activists from seven European and American countries (all were expelled by Moroccan authorities in 22 separate confrontations) in a bid to attract Western media and political attention to the cause.[14] The Committee made a similar effort in 2017.[15] Such active forms of support to the causes of research participants is integral to the ethical demands of feminist research. Thus, whilst putting research participants at risk seems, at first sight, an ethical abyss, in the case of occupied Western Sahara, such risks are necessary in order to comply with the desire and need of Saharawi activists for international witnesses to their situation. The Belmont Report, an essential reference for guiding the ethics of academic research, upholds the principle of 'do no harm' but also considers putting participants at risk (that is, accepting that harm might occur) as ethically acceptable when the research holds potential benefits for these same participants.[16] What I am advocating here is that, to further the depth and breadth of Resistance Studies research, we need to consider the (long-term) political and human rights advantages to participants of risky research when evaluating the risk/benefit balance.

Of course, acting as a witness involves the retelling of what one has observed. Remaining a silent witness would undo my entire argument thus far regarding the ethics of putting Saharawi research participants at risk. Later in the article, therefore, I expose strategies for Resistance Studies academics to fulfil this ethical obligation of 'retelling.' For now though, I move on to the next ethical dilemma, which explores dishonesty in the face of state authorities.

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[13] Personal communications with *Sahara Thawra*, November 2013.
[14] See http://www.vest-sahara.no/a49x2362 [accessed 31 January 2017].
[15] See http://www.vest-sahara.no/a49x2488 [accessed 31 January 2017].
[16] See https://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/regulations-and-policy/belmont-report/#xassess [accessed 31 January 2017].

Dilemma II: State permissions and lying to authorities

The phone rings through to a recorded message. The Consulate is shut for Easter. My colleague, a Norwegian national and researcher from the University of Bergen, has more luck. Whilst she recounts the events of the last few hours to her compatriots, I try to persuade a police escort to stop the car for a bathroom break. He eventually relents. In fact, we have three further stops for our driver to take coffee on our long route north. Finally, the policeman decides (or is instructed) to leave us in a car park in Agadir. As we step out, so too do the six or so passengers of two tinted-window people-carriers, which have trailed us since the last town. We look for a hostel. The plainclothes police follow us. They book the rooms on either side of ours.

Officers had asked us to dismount the coach at the final checkpoint before El Aaiún city. This is standard practice. Moroccan authorities check that non-Moroccan travelers are tourists, UN staff or employees of Morocco's corporate partners before allowing entry into the occupied capital. Those suspected of planning to meet with Saharawis that hold the 'wrong' opinions are often not admitted. I had spoken to several academics, writers and Saharawi solidarity activists who had made similar trips before I embarked on mine. I can summarise their advice as follows: take the bus, not the aeroplane (authorities are more likely to google you at an airport than at a roadside checkpoint); insist that you are a tourist; claim ignorance of the Western Sahara conflict; travel by night, when officers are more likely to become sleepy and lax. It didn't work for my colleague and I, that time.

Following our deportation to Agadir, we are shadowed by a relay of plain-clothes police and civilian informers who harass us to varying degrees. Their purpose, we eventually conclude, is to intimidate us to an extent that we will never return. Actually, the experience strengthens our resolve to try again. A few months later, I go back, alone this time, entrusting myself to the precise instructions of Saharawi friends. This is how I end up crossing the border under the dashboard of Saleh's car,

the moral scaffolding I had built so carefully in my head weakening under the suddenly tangible weight of potential police threat to my friends.[17]

The first time I entered Western Sahara, then, I actively lied to Moroccan occupying authorities by claiming to be a tourist. The second time I merely slipped past the military checkpoints. I am not the first academic to do so and I know I have not been the last. But what are the ethics of acting deceptively vis-à-vis Moroccan authorities? One immediate concern was that I could create difficulties for academics wishing to carry out non-political research in Western Sahara in the future. However, this was deemed very unlikely by other academics that I approached, who had carried out similar research under the radar of the Moroccan authorities and had a wealth of experience to advise me on such matters. In any case though, surely a researcher should not be carrying out research on human subjects without the permission of the state, should they? With reference to Western Sahara, the question is complicated by a second necessary question: from which state(s) should one request permission? From, Morocco, the illegal occupier? Or from the Saharawi state-in-exile, which is not yet recognized by any Western state, but the leaders of which are recognized (by the UN) as the sole representatives of the people of Western Sahara? Or from both?

Wolf points out that how (feminist) fieldworkers have navigated the 'necessary and often problematic' negotiation of approval and clearance from state authorities is not usually discussed, 'particularly in settings where those responsible for perpetuating systems of injustice and inequality must be appeased in order for the research to be conducted' (1996, 23). Fawzi El-Solh states that most fieldworkers

[17] By 'suddenly tangible,' I mean that the risks I had foreseen from the comfort of my university library carried far more emotional weight once they became 'real,' in the field. I am not the first researcher to have such an experience, of course. For example, Annie Pohlman, discussing her research amongst Indonesian ex-political prisoners and torture survivors, tells of witnessing police harassment and intimidation of her research participants during her fieldwork, probably due to her presence. Pohlman highlights that her research participants understood the risks far better than even she could, and that her research is designed to help avoid future human atrocities. However, she still asks herself whether the potential benefits of research can ever justify the potential negative consequences for those who chose to share their stories (Pohlman 2013).

‘will at some point in their research find a measure of dishonesty unavoidable. The crucial question should be how much harm we thereby cause those we seek to study’ (El-Solh cited in Wolf 1996, 12). I argue below that it puts Saharawi activists (my ‘subjects of study’ in El-Solh’s terms) at greater risk of harm to seek permission from the Moroccan state.

As we have seen in the previous section, Saharawi activists are keen to meet and host foreign visitors and thereby engage international civil society, despite the risks they incur in doing so. Indeed, engaging international witnesses, who constitute potential conduits to allies amongst international civil society, is key to the Saharawi nonviolent struggle. Some academics, concerned (foreign) citizens and politicians have travelled to the occupied zone by securing permission from the Moroccan authorities. As a result, some of these visitors have been permitted to meet anti-occupation activists as well as individuals handpicked by the Moroccan authorities. Nevertheless, the nationalist activists are often punished by the authorities following the visit. The aforementioned group of UK politicians, for example, attempted to visit Western Sahara in 2013, but were turned back upon arriving at El Aaiún airport. They returned the following year with permission from the Moroccan state for their visit. Permission was granted on the condition that the delegation met with several groups handpicked by the Moroccan authorities that supported Morocco’s official position on the conflict. The politicians were also permitted to meet with some Saharawi anti-occupation and human rights activists. However, some of the latter had their property damaged and one had his car permanently confiscated in retribution for meeting with foreign actors and voicing ‘dissident’ views.[18]

If one can get to the home of a local activist whilst escaping the watchful eyes of the authorities, the lack of permissions can therefore constitute less rather than more risks for nationalist Saharawis: if one seeks permission from the Moroccan occupiers, the authorities will know for sure when one speaks to a pro-independence activist. If one manages to enter the territory secretly, the risks for participants lesson. Seeking

[18] Conversations with the Coordinator of the UK All Party Parliamentary Group on Western Sahara, January 2015.

permission in no way ensures the safety of nationalists that the researcher wishes to interview. It could, however, result in a disproportionate amount of data from those that support the Moroccan view. Seen from this perspective, circumnavigating the Moroccan authorities' permissions process is a tactic for avoiding harm to research participants, as well as for ensuring access to another data set.

Approaching the Moroccan state is also questionable in that Morocco does not have the status to grant research permissions in another country (Western Sahara is, after all, another country.) Morocco today administers the occupied part of Western Sahara in contravention of international law, hundreds of UN Security Council resolutions and the UN Charter itself, and by doing so is committing 'one of the most egregious violations of the international order codified in the wake of World War Two' (Mundy 2007, 1). Let us once again bear in mind El-Solh's argument on striving to cause the least harm to 'subjects-of-study' when considering deception. Requesting Morocco's permission before interviewing Saharawis recognizes, in some small way, the regime's authority over occupied Western Sahara. Recognising the occupation goes against the work, principles and aims of Saharawi activists (and indeed of the UN). It causes them harm.

There is also a legal question. Let us consider the latest legal case on occupied Western Sahara: on 21 December 2016 the highest court of the EU found that the EU cannot enter into trade agreements with Morocco to exploit the natural resources of Western Sahara without consulting, and gaining the express consent of, the Saharawi people's representatives the POLISARIO.[19] Following this precedent, surely the most legally robust approach for academics wishing to carry out research in occupied Western Sahara is to seek permission from POLISARIO rather than Morocco. This, I believe, is the most ethically sound course of action for a research project like mine. However, since Morocco, in practical terms, administers occupied Western Sahara, this case also illustrates the particular and nuanced sociopolitical

[19] See http://www.wsrw.org/a105x3695 [accessed 1 February 2017].

(and arguably legal) understanding that is needed to guide the ethics of research in this area.

Dilemma III: Personal risk and privilege

It's like when you drop an ice cream on the floor. At first, one wasp buzzes over and begins devouring the melting goo. Then, over time, more and more wasps appear and after a while the ice cream is swarming. That's what it feels like in Agadir, like the whole town is on to us. There were just a few men at first. Now the authorities have informers everywhere taking photos, notes, approaching us to ask questions, to intimidate. After dark, in a café, a kind woman discreetly leaves a note on our table. 'Be careful. Bad men are waiting for you outside.' In Marrakesh, the threat is communicated more directly. We are having breakfast in a friend's house when police storm in and threaten to 'beat everyone up' if we don't get out immediately. In Rabat, police try to put a (stolen?) wallet on my person. The Easter holidays now over, I call the Consulate again.

I get an appointment with the UK Consul for Morocco and Mauritania. My Norwegian colleague and I meet her in the Rabat offices. We are received in a cramped room, devoid of natural light, and separated from the Consul by a Perspex screen, as if we are inmates enjoying our bimonthly visitors rights. It is the Consulate's responsibility to intervene on behalf of its citizens if their rights are abused abroad. Could the Consul ask its Moroccan colleagues why Moroccan police had forcibly deported me from a third country? Morocco has a right to, and I quote the Consul, 'police its borders.' OK. But can it police the borders of a third country? Responded the Consul, it can deport those visitors 'doing political stuff. […] They want to avoid bad publicity on Western Sahara […] and that's their right.' We debate, but get nowhere. Nevertheless, after leaving the Consular buildings, police and civilian informer harassment is turned down several notches. My (unfair) British privilege is palpably real.

It is common for solidarity activists deported from Western Sahara to engage with their consular and diplomatic services. This is to encourage our national representatives to reprimand Morocco for deporting and harassing foreign observers, thus increasing the safety and ease of the latter's visits and thereby facilitating international engagement with the Western Sahara issue. From my perspective, by maintaining that Morocco was policing 'its' borders when it deported me, the Consul's position contravened the UK's official policy of non-recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. I followed up the issue with my parliamentary representative and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) when I returned home, and, months later, was told that the FCO had raised my deportation (presumably in writing) with Moroccan authorities but had received no response. If Britain wishes to maintain its worldwide reputation for international and high-impact research, we need our government to defend its researchers and thereby academic freedom. At the same time though, I argue in this section that researchers also need universities to give them the freedom to take certain risks. I take my own experience of the Risk Assessment process as a starting point for my argument.

The personal Risk Assessment process (i.e. risks for the researcher, not the participants) for my fieldwork was straightforward. Unlike the Ethical Review, which was dealt with at university level, the Risk Assessment was managed at departmental level. I filled in a short form, emailed it to the relevant address, and that was the last I heard of it. If I was fully aware and open about the risks to Saharawis in the Ethical Review, I undoubtedly (and naively) underestimated some of the risks to my person. In the Risk Assessment, whilst I pointed out that Moroccan police do not look upon meetings between foreign observers and Saharawi pro-independence activists kindly, and that political violence against the latter was common, and that I may have belongings confiscated by police, I at no point anticipated the level of police intimidation that I would experience.

Perhaps my Risk Assessment process was also relatively simple because I was situated in a languages and cultural studies department, where risky fieldwork is

probably less common than in other disciplines. Indeed, Liz Storer and Anna Shoemaker have pointed out that the Risk Assessment process is often foregone in disciplines not commonly considered 'political' or 'sensitive.'[20] Perhaps it was because I was travelling to a city that the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office considers green, that is, safe (it is ironic that Western Sahara regular features on the NGO Freedom House's annual list of the 'worst of the worst' territories in the world in terms of repression, and yet it is perfectly safe for British tourists wishing to enjoy the kite surfing opportunities of the Sahara's Atlantic coast).

Perhaps the Risk Assessment process was quick and easy because my field research was completed before the murder of Cambridge University PhD researcher Giulio Regeni whilst he was researching trade union opposition to the regime in Egypt. His case raised questions about the duty of care of PhD students, the – as Urbano points out in this issue – influence of neoliberal discourses influencing conceptions of risk and responsibility in academia (Urbano 2017, see also Jessee 2017, 347), and the resulting ever more strenuous Risk Assessment procedures, which, argue Mateja Peter and Francesco Strazzari (2016, 2), mean that the type of field research Regeni envisaged (that is, research amongst resistance activists themselves) is becoming increasingly difficult to undertake.

Perhaps the Risk Assessment process at my institution was pain-free because I knew, myself, that my white and British privilege meant that I was not at *serious* risk in occupied Western Sahara. Although at least one researcher of Arab origin (a Human Rights Watch employee) has been detained and violently abused for interviewing Saharawi activists (Human Rights Watch 2010), I know of no white visitors of European citizenship that have been treated brutally by Moroccan police for carrying out research in Western Sahara. That said, short periods of detention and abduction, as well as deportation, general harassment and attempts by police to place stolen or illegal goods on one's person are realistic if less serious risks, even for someone like myself who unfairly enjoys white and British privilege.

[20] See http://www.real-project.eu/field-diary-special-issue-call-for-contributions/, accessed 23 September 2017.

But my decision to take any risk at all has implications for my host university, and therefore raises the ethical question of putting my employer at possible risk of liability. Again, I am able to write this article precisely because the department hosting me at the outset of my project in October 2013 let me undertake my envisaged fieldwork despite the (less serious) risks. However, perhaps if I had realized the full extent of the risks, this would not have been the case. Indeed, my naivety and the potential implications for the university should something 'serious' have happened to me rightly formed part of discussions at my doctoral viva (that said, I still maintain that 'serious' consequences are low risk for white, British researchers in the case of occupied Western Sahara). In a growing climate of 'securitisation of research' in European universities (Peter 2016), I worry that similar research is becoming impossible precisely because of the increasing fears of liability intensified by the Regeni case.[21]

Peter and Strazzari (2016) have explored how European academics carrying out work in conflict zones have responded to this recent 'securitization of research.' They find that some academics simply preclude interviews with 'sensitive subjects' from their research. Others avoid the risk management process entirely by employing local research assistants to carry out the risky work for them. Some European academics take risk-management practices to such an extent that the researcher is placed in a 'safety bubble (security as protection), [which] remove[s] her from the locals' (Peter and Strazzari 2016, 16).

Of course, all these strategies could affect the richness and value of data, and, in the second example, raise serious ethical questions. In the case of occupied Western Sahara, foregoing the relative impunity that my white and British privilege gives me and passing significantly higher risks to Saharawi research assistants would arguably be highly unethical. To avoid such outcomes, Strazzari himself admits to foregoing

[21] For a gendered reading of the increasingly intensified risk assessment processes see https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2016/aug/19/new-rules-to-protect-women-researchers-abroad-are-sexist-and-dangerous?CMP=share_btn_tw [accessed 1 February 2017].

his pre-travel commitments (made with the funder and employer) concerning risk-management once in the field in Mali. Had he not have done so, he ‘would not have come even close to the findings obtained by the end of [his] fieldwork’ (2016, 11).

Michel Wieviorka takes a wider view. Although conscious of the need for universities to take into account the dangers researchers face from authorities when carrying out research amongst resistance activists, he is concerned that the academy’s response might be silence in the face of authoritarianism.[22] Furthermore, Wieviorka points to the situation of academics living and working in countries ruled by authoritarian regimes. Those who speak on the side of truth and justice face very real risk of dismissal, imprisonment and other forms of human rights abuses. One could argue that those of us academics that enjoy the privileged, relative immunity that certain citizenships bring have a moral duty to make use of that privilege. A quotation from Noam Chomsky is pertinent here:

> Academics are just people with privilege and privileged resources, so they have the kinds of responsibilities that accrue to that. […] [Y]ou can do quite a lot, in free societies, to influence what is done by the power systems. This is even more the case in places like the US and Britain which are right at the centre of world power (Chomsky quoted in Widdows 2005, 197).

In summary, I would argue that the ethical imperative for academia to carry out potentially high impact research on nonviolent resistance to authoritarianism, peacebuilding, conflict resolution and so on should outweigh the risks that universities take in allowing academics to undertake research in areas or topics seen as ‘risky,’ ‘dangerous,’ or ‘politically sensitive.’ From a policy perspective, and to use the eloquent metaphor of Susan Thomson, when it comes to risky research fields, ‘[w]aiting for the guns to fall silent can mean that policy action is not informed by empirical research’ (2009, 2). Similarly, Matthew Porges and Christian Leuprecht

[22] See http://bibliobs.nouvelobs.com/idees/20160210.OBS4404/menaces-de-mort-sur-les-sciences-sociales.html?utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&utm_campaign=Echobox&utm_term=Autofeed#link_time=1455138096 [accessed 1 February 2017].

point out with reference to the case of Western Sahara that '[p]opular activist attention to the conflict is limited in part due to the lack of academic research' (2016, 67). Since, as I argued earlier, solidarity of international civil society is integral to the success of the Saharawi nonviolent resistance struggle, this lack has tangible and serious consequences. From an activist perspective, some police intimidation and harassment is not a price high enough to forego the ethical obligation of paying academic attention to a persecuted and generally ignored people. The Risk Assessment process for researchers should be divorced from the Ethical Review process, just as it was at my host university. Flexibility must be accorded to Resistance Studies researchers that are willing to take 'less serious' risks in the pursuit of knowledge and justice.

Dilemma IV: Anonymity

The eldest sister in the family that hosted me in El Aaiún in August-September 2014 did not identify as an activist, but had her own ways of opposing the occupation. The house was under constant surveillance by plain-clothes police and Moroccan informers due to the history of activism of her brothers. Spies would attempt to listen at the ground floor window. One morning, whilst folding up her children's blankets, through the bars of the open window, my hostess' eyes met those of a spy, a profession which, she later told me, is frowned upon in Islam. Whilst continuing to fold the blankets, she uttered loudly, for the benefit of the spy, a phrase from the Quran:

> ...And We have put a bar in front of them and a bar behind them, and further, We have covered them up; so that they cannot see.[23]

Ensuring research participant anonymity takes on new importance, but brings new difficulties, in a field context shaped by an oppressive regime with 1984-esque tendencies. Before I left for the field, I devised several plans to avoid Moroccan

[23] From the ninth verse of chapter 36, "Surat Ya Sin," in the Quran.

authorities confiscating incriminating data. Once there, I was able to follow these plans without incident. However, there was one eventuality that I had not predicted or planned for: the majority of research participants did not *want* to be anonymous.

Generally in academia, maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of participants is regarded as paramount to ethical research. There are few studies of research ethics that question this. Burr and Reynolds is one exception, arguing that in the case of interviewees being professionals, anonymity may be odds with professional responsibility and transparency (2010, 132). However, there is little consideration of the ethics of maintaining anonymity when participants have expressly requested that their real names appear in research publications. During my fieldwork in both occupied Western Sahara and later in Equatorial Guinea, when I explained to each participant that, should I quote them in my written work, I would ensure the anonymity of their remarks and stories, most reacted with surprise. Said one participant, 'anonymous? What do you mean anonymous? I stand by what I said. Use my name'.[24] Others regarded their interviews with me as a form of personal testimony-giving, and firmly rejected my proposal to anonymize *their* testimonies. In such cases, following my university's ethical policy strictly would amount to denying the rights of my research participants to maintain ownership of their own stories, experiences and insights. I have therefore (and with the blessing of the Ethical Review Committee of my then host university when I submitted a post-fieldwork revision to my Review) kept names attached to data when requested to, concluding that this is the most ethical solution. Nevertheless, this example illustrates the *nuanced* approach that some Resistance Studies scholars need in order for their data to be generated and presented as ethically as possible.

Activist approaches to Resistance Studies research

Thus far, I have argued that for research in Resistance Studies, it is necessary, seemingly paradoxically, to contravene some of the traditional plinths of 'ethical'

[24] Personal conversations with Boturu, April 2015.

research in order to conduct fieldwork that was truly 'ethical' from a feminist (and therefore activist) position. But my arguments for contravention can only have a chance at standing on one condition: I must be capable and willing to meet the expectations of Saharawi activists in shining light on the abuses they suffer and sharing their histories and perspectives 'back home' in Britain. The 'condition' became all the more urgent once I was in the field. It became an ongoing and cherished socio-political 'debt' that I owe to those who took time, and risks, to share their stories. A quotation from my host is useful for illustrating this point. He said, after I had interviewed three women in his home, 'these women think you are here to help them' (Allan, August - September 2014).[25] Another interviewee explained, '[w]hen young people in the Occupied Territories see someone who is blonde they think that their small demonstration has the power to make a difference' (Mahdi Mayara quoted in Allan, 18 November 2015). Below I outline various possibilities for meeting the 'condition' and repaying the 'debt'. I also justify why I took (and take) one approach over others.

As Grabhill highlights, some researchers advocate an 'activist-stance,' by using participatory action research (PAR) methodologies and ensuring the coproduction of knowledge (Grabhill 2000). PAR involves 'the co-definition of problems and research questions and [emphasises] the collaborative nature of research processes' (Grabhill 2000, 46). In other words, those who would traditionally be research participants become the researchers themselves. Nevertheless, in my case the way PhD funding worked meant I would not be able to economically support fellow researchers, and thus I would always hold the reins of power in deciding the topic of research, how to conduct it and in what conclusions to draw and write up from the data. In any case, I expect that, at least in Western Sahara, the activists with whom I wished to do fieldwork would not have the time or space or indeed desire to develop academic scholarship when in the midst of a nonviolent war against an authoritarian and volatile regime. Indeed, activist scholars Rhoda Rae Gutierrez and Pauline Lipman

[25] I should emphasise that I shared an information sheet with all participants concerning the PhD project. However, it was evident, once I was in the field, that it was an expectation, amongst several participants, that I would 'share their stories,' beyond the parameters of the aims of my PhD research.

have faced similar issues when envisioning PAR projects in their local community. They comment that 'at times, community organizations do not have the capacity to take on research roles and need us to shoulder that work' (2016, 1242). Nevertheless, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1994) have highlighted the propensity of white, Western writers to recreate asymmetric power relations in their studies of the postcolonial subject. PAR perhaps presents the best avenue for avoiding the recreation of such power relations. Furthermore, it rightly challenges the assumption that universities and academics are the best providers of 'expert' knowledge. My inability to use such a methodology limits the extent to which I can truly call my research 'feminist,' even if the intentions were feminist.

Another option is to take on the role of the 'activist-scholar' (Gillan 2012), that is, to develop work designed to be beneficial and informative to the movements one studies. Hale uses the powerful example of the usefulness of geo-mapping for indigenous land claims (2006, 110). On the other hand, not all academic research can be so easily useful. I would hazard to say that, in some cases, including in the case of my own academic research to date, there are limits as to how useful (and indeed timely and accessible) academic research can be. As Croteau has put it, '[b]ecoming an academic to support social movements is akin to launching a space program to develop a pen that writes upside down. At best, it is a circuitous route' (Croteau quoted in Gillan 2012).

Stopping short of an activist approach, another option is to ensure that the research is designed to itself be used for informing policy. Some feminist researchers (and others) have focused on such policy-orientated research, which can be politically useful to communities whose lives are dramatically affected by the policy decisions of others. As my research focused on women, gender and resistance, several women interviewees raised concerns regarding a 'double oppression,' that is, fighting a foreign occupation but also struggling, at times, against sexism within their own, as well as Moroccan, society. The written product of my research itself, then, is not a polished, shining picture of Saharawi activist society that could be used itself as a

strong piece of advocacy on behalf of the Saharawi independence cause. Reflecting the critical views of my interviewees (as a researcher should), I show the challenges as well as the achievements of this community.[26] As for policy-influencing, although my own research conclusions show how the foreign policy of certain Western countries undermines gender equality for Saharawi and Equatoguinean women, I regretfully do not expect my PhD research itself to influence policy in this vein. Indeed, several researchers point out that although policy makers have good quality research at their hands, policy change is currently determined by racist and classist neoliberal agendas and therefore even policy or advocacy-focused research must be linked to organizing and activism if it is to contribute to social change (Rae Guttierez 2016, Cox 2014).

I found that the most suitable approach, for the context I was working in, was to attempt to be an activist *and* a researcher in two parallel roles: an activist/researcher. The activist/researcher accepts that her academic work may be of limited use to the movement she studies and therefore commits to aiding a movement in other ways. This follows the notion of reciprocity to which many feminist fieldworkers subscribe.[27] As Smeltzer (2012) has pointed out, activism can encompass several activities, from direct action, participating in and organizing demonstrations to 'back-office' work such as grant-writing and legal assistance Below, I outline briefly the types of action I have been able to realise as an activist/researcher in order to illuminate how I envisage this role.

I am in the fortunate position to have volunteered with Saharawi solidarity organizations since 2007. I am currently a member of Western Sahara Campaign UK (WSC), which lobbies the UK government amongst other targets on natural resource exploitation in Western Sahara (we currently have a court case against the UK

[26] See Ortner (1995) for a useful discussion on why Resistance Studies must pay attention to the political struggles internal to liberation movements if we are to advocate for a truly just future.

[27] In line with the view that, in order for research to be "feminist," someone other than the researcher should benefit, many feminists engage of acts of reciprocity with their informants and interviewees, offering money (such as a share of book royalties) or other favours.

government for allowing the sale of products from occupied Western Sahara in UK supermarkets, erroneously labeled as Moroccan) and human rights abuses of Saharawis (we encourage the UK government to use its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to push for UN human rights monitoring in Western Sahara). I also form part of Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW), a network of activists from over 40 countries, which works to end all exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources that is realized without the consent of the Saharawi people. We carry out research on, and campaign to end, this plunder as we share Saharawis' belief that it undermines the UN peace process and reinforces a brutal occupation (Allan 2016). Our research was used in court in POLISARIO's 21 December 2016 case against the European Union [EU] in the EU's Court of Justice, which has confirmed that the EU's trade deals with Morocco are illegal insofar as they apply to Western Sahara. Our research also underpins our wider campaigning and lobbying of parliamentarians, companies and shareholders.

Being a member of networks such as WSC and WSRW made it easy to collect data that, with the informed consent of participants, could be used more widely than for a single-authored PhD project, and could contribute to action-orientated activities. For example, I used the testimonies of women interviewees in a 2016 submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review of Morocco on women rights abuses. This was part of a wider coordinated effort by Saharawi-led and solidarity organisations to enter submissions on various types of Moroccan regime human rights abuses against Saharawis. I have also used these women's testimonies whilst lobbying members of the European Union parliament. In 2014 I wrote a more detailed report on the wider abuses documented during my fieldwork for WSC's UK-focused lobbying and campaigning activities. I also joined a group of activists working to facilitate access for foreign observers to occupied Western Sahara. None of these activities would have been possible if I had not (tried to) enter occupied Western Sahara. At the same time none constituted 'academic outputs' in any traditional sense. Such a parallel approach is how I envisage the role of an activist/researcher.

Conclusion

Arguably, in-depth research on nonviolent resistance is essential for a more peaceful future for humankind. Yet the increasing securitisation of research threatens the growth of the field. Standard plinths of academic ethical research frameworks at times conflict with a feminist approach to ethics that foregrounds solidarity with the research participants. In the case of occupied Western Sahara, Saharawis see hosting researchers (and others) as worth significant risk, since securing witnesses to the abuses they suffer increases the legitimacy, and therefore power, of their nonviolent movement. It also fosters the forging of international allies, which Saharawis also see as essential to the success of the movement. As long as academics commit to meeting Saharawi activists' expectations in terms of solidarity by taking an activist approach to research, I have argued here that it is not unethical to put Saharawis at risk by visiting the field. Likewise, the complicated questions surrounding personal risk, anonymity and state permissions should not be enough to deter research. Academia should not close its borders to under-researched, almost invisible human plights and injustices under the name of 'Ethics' and 'Risk Management.'

Feminist and activist research, when undertaken amongst a resistance movement living the conditions of struggle that I outline in this paper, necessarily challenges the existing paradigms of academic ethical and risk review processes. We need bold and brave approaches to ethics and risk – that is, an applied understanding of *activist ethics* – for Resistance Studies research to grow, show solidarity and ensure action.

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