

CONVERSATIONS THAT RESIST, #AOM EPISODE: BACK FROM COPENHAGEN: CONVERSATIONS WITH THE CMS COMMUNITY

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The AOM is a conference *sui generis*. On one hand, it is a snapshot of North America, with all its contradictions—perhaps more vivid now than ever, sadly for all of us. On the other hand, it is a place where academics from all over the world come together—a space where you truly have the chance to meet anyone working on your topics, wherever they may be based.

In this special issue of *Conversations That Resist*, I want to share a few significant moments of exchange I've experienced here in Copenhagen—particularly with colleagues from the Critical Management Division (and beyond). These are scholars I deeply admire, and whose presence I look forward to during events like this—people who would never decide if talking to you based on what's printed on your conference badge.

During this long lunch with a co-author—also a mentor, and by now a dear friend—we shared so much about these contradictions: what is happening to our countries in the West, what it means to live in the big city versus in the provinces, where we position ourselves within systems we no longer recognize, and how we manage to survive within them.

Over the past few days, I've had many conversations of resistance like this—and I've witnessed many others, full of energy. They've happened during formal and informal social events, over lunches and dinners, on city walks, in the pauses between sessions. In the company of old friends and new acquaintances, these moments have come unexpectedly, and meaningfully.

“I was really looking forward to lunch with a friend—finally, I took off my tie and can talk like myself again.”

Many friends and colleagues are currently deep in the job market. Amidst the tension and density of this 2025 conference season, many are searching for a place for their research. I've had so many conversations like this.

“You're from the same town? That's beautiful!”

I say this to two colleagues who are telling me about their search for a new position. They hand me their CVs for feedback and, in the process, realize they're both from the same small city in the south of their country. Tiny worlds and places connecting at the charging stations for our laptops and phones.

One evening, that of the *CMS social event*, there's a dish with a butter sculpture that looks like a cloud. We're in a beautiful courtyard sipping drinks, facing the city's main canal bustling with people—yet we feel somewhat isolated in this outdoor space, in a good way. I hardly know anyone; I'm awkward at times. But my friend and coauthor is ready to catch my gaze and say:

“Come on, let's go talk to someone. Come—I'll bring you with me.”

Around us there's a buzz. The atmosphere is alive. I see colleagues and friends speaking up: some are sharing stories, some are being ironic, some are angry and protesting, some withdraw, some listen and reflect—in all of these ways, we resist.

“My country and my university are not easy places if you're a critical scholar. You'd think otherwise, but it's not a welcoming environment for critical work.”

“Really? I wouldn't have guessed.”

“Oh, yes.”



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We reflect on what we share, exchanging some sarcasm in between.

“For those of us coming from the Global South, working in Europe is frustrating. You’re always the one from ‘outside the EU,’ and then also from the South...”

“Your accent, the way you speak... they’re always pretexts to ask you to speak as little as possible.”

“You know, that happens even between northern and southern Italy. Your accent seems to carry less weight. You feel it. They ask you to repeat yourself. They say ‘that’s not real Italian’... Now more than ever, people feel entitled to say these things.”

“But you’re in Italy and you’re Italian—you can fight back. You can speak up. For us, it’s different. When you’re not a citizen, when you’re from ‘outside’... you really have to think twice before speaking.”

We reflect on privilege while the rain starts to fall and we find shelter under an umbrella. Of course, we don’t solve these injustices in a single conversation—but we name them, we acknowledge them, we resist them. Some raise their voices. We challenge assumptions together.

“You might not know this. But mine happens to be one of the worst passports in the world.”

I stayed silent a lot—listening, truly. I wanted to. I was happy to be in a space where dialogue and listening felt free. A space where everyone could share where they were in their academic journey, how they were feeling, and where they wanted to go.

Although CMS is a smaller community compared to other divisions at the Academy, its resistance is real—even as it exists within the dynamics of a large North American event. That resistance is tangible. It’s clear what kind of scholars this community attracts—and that’s energizing.

I’ve seen people express emotion, get angry, open up about their vulnerabilities, laugh out loud, take a photo together, look around feeling a bit lost and hear someone say: *Come on, I’ll introduce you to someone.*

We’ve talked about the contradictions of our work, the institutions we belong to, our voices—without feeling judged, and while learning from each other. *I’m grateful.*



Critical Management Studies

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