



2025 ISSUE 2 · JULY

CMS NEWSLETTER

CMS is a Division of the Academy of Management

Editor's Note

BY KESHAV KRISHNAMURTY

Dear Colleagues,

The 85th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Management in Copenhagen, Denmark, is upon us. It is my pleasure to deliver to you our latest CMS newsletter. In our July issue, we have a few changes, including two entirely new regular features. The first new feature by Daniela Aliberti, "Conversations that Resist", consists of conversations with friends and colleagues about topics that matter to us. The second feature, by yours truly, is called "Surreal But Serious" and uses comedy to discuss serious issues in a lighthearted way. We also feature early career critical scholar Iresha Donmanige in this issue.

If you would like to respond to a piece in the CMS Newsletter, become a contributor, issue a call for papers, or anything else, please get in touch with me at either keshav.krishnamurty@utoronto.ca or keshav.krishnamurty@iiml.org.



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Critical
Management
Studies

A Division of the Academy of Management

A MESSAGE FROM THE DIVISION CHAIRS

GHAZAL MIR ZULFIQAR AND ALEXANDRA BRISTOW

Dear friends,

The 2025 Academy of Management Conference is upon us, and we are excited to welcome you to the CMS Division's carefully curated PDW and scholarly program. Whether you are an emerging scholar, doctoral student or senior academic, our program is sure to draw you in. Please browse through this newsletter for details on the plenaries, keynote session, doctoral student consortium, PDWs and scholarly program. After an exhausting day of nonstop PDWs join us Saturday evening for an offsite CMS social to meet old friends and more importantly, to make new ones.

Special thanks to Jennifer Manning and Seray Ergene for putting together the PDW sessions, Paulina Segarra and Marcus Gomes for curating the scholarly program and plenaries, Penelope Muzanenhemo for arranging the keynote session, Fabio Saldanha, Richard Longman and Caroline Clarke for arranging the doctoral consortium and for the entire Exec team for their support in the planning, preparation and dissemination in the lead up to Copenhagen!

We are looking forward to celebrating this year's CMS Division awards during the Business Meeting in the Bella Center. Please join us on Saturday, Jul 26 2025, 10:00AM - 11:30AM CEST (GMT+2/UTC+2) to MR180 to meet the winners as they receive well deserved recognition for their outstanding work, thank the sponsors and everyone involved in the award process, and hear updates about the Division. The list of award winners and their sponsors will also be featured in the next newsletter.

We hope to see you in person in Copenhagen. If you plan not to attend the conference, do connect with us online.

In peace and solidarity,
Alex and Ghazal



A HEADS-UP FOR COPENHAGEN - AGAIN!

BY JEN MANNING

The 2025 Annual Meeting is upon us, and we are departing North America for the first time for a European visit! We look forward to seeing you very soon in Copenhagen, which is set to be a different AOM experience. Most notably, all divisions and sessions will be hosted together in one (massive) conference center, The Bella Center.

We covered this the last time but thought we'd go over this again so everyone has this fresh in mind, as well as for anyone who needs any last-minute tips. The Bella Center is located about 8km outside of central (downtown) Copenhagen, but with public transport, it is only a 20-minute (regularly scheduled) train journey away. The Bella Center is on the M1 Green Metro line, so if you're planning on staying in central Copenhagen, where most accommodation options are located, we would suggest staying near one of the M1 metro stops. The Kongens Nytorv metro stop by the iconic Nyhavn area and the Christianshavns metro stop in the Christianshavns district seem to be the most central areas on the M1 metro line that are in relatively close proximity to the Bella Center.

Being a conference centre, there won't be much catering or food options in the Bella Center. There will be 'grab and go' food and drink items for purchase in various locations within the Bella Centre and there are about 20 cafes, restaurants, and markets located within a 10-minute walk. The CMS social will be hosted offsite in central Copenhagen.

Attending the Annual Meeting can be exhausting at times, and this year with thousands of delegates all under one roof even veteran scholars may find themselves overwhelmed. But with a much-heightened demand for the CMS division this year, we hope that there will be a great representation of CMS scholars in Copenhagen making AOM 2025 an engaging and welcoming event.

My survival strategy will be packing my bag with snacks, enjoying meeting old friends and making new ones, and decompressing from the day's events with evening walks along the many Copenhagen waterfronts.

Helpful links

[The Bella Center Website](#)

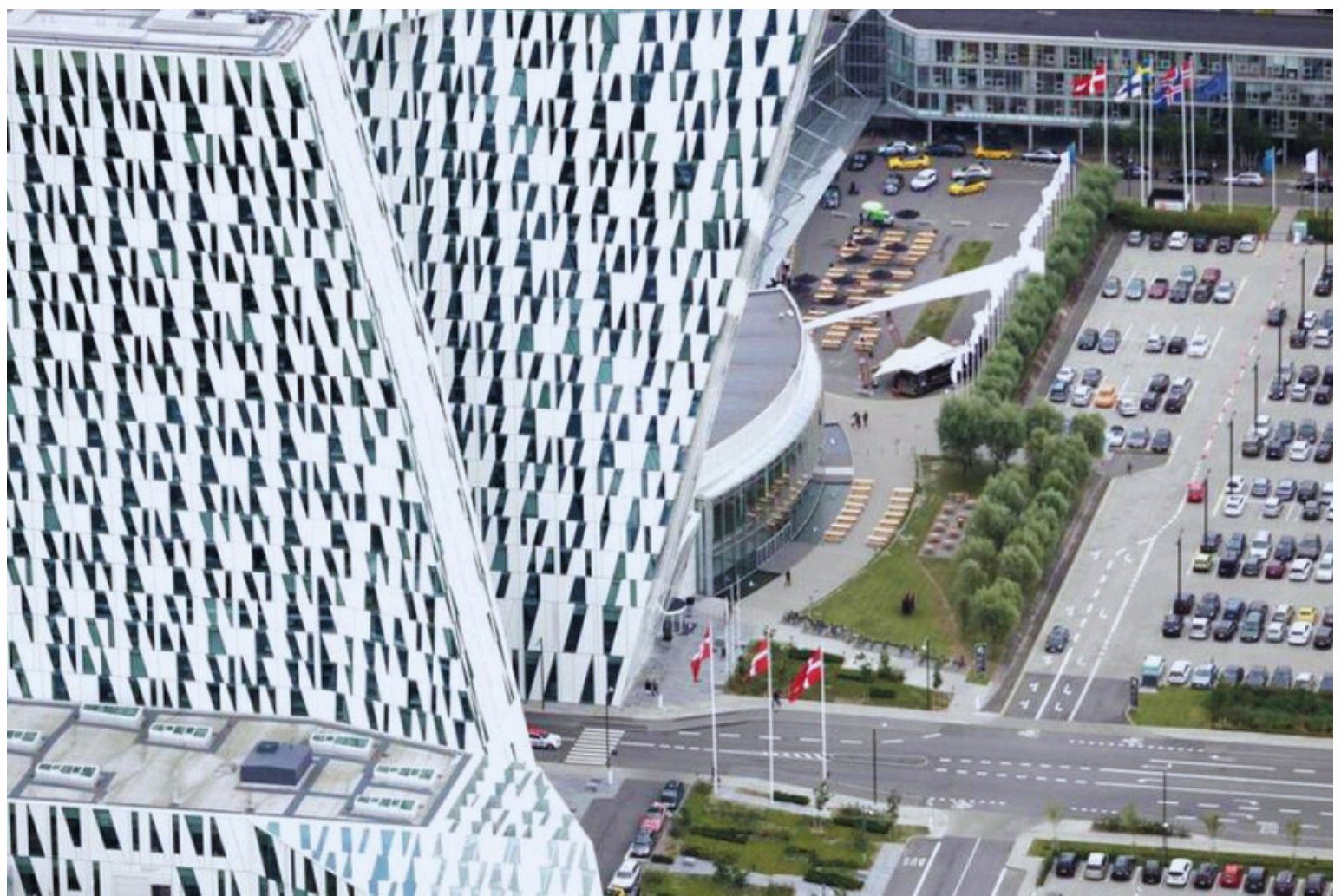
[AOM's Welcome to Copenhagen](#)

[AOM's Visa Information](#)

[Copenhagen Metro Green Line](#)

[Copenhagen Activities](#)





DIVISION EVENTS IN COPENHAGEN



CMS PLENARY: EMANCIPATION, SOCIAL CHANGE AND EDUCATION IN CMS

Session 25164: Sunday July 27th, 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM CEST (GMT + 2). Bella Center: Hall B- B4-m6.

The Critical Management Studies (CMS) division invites you to a thought-provoking plenary session examining the foundational roots of CMS scholarship and its enduring commitment to emancipation. This session will explore how CMS contributes to social and environmental change, emphasizing the division's dedication to social and environmental justice. This session will reflect on CMS's rich tradition of interrogating neoliberalism, (anti)racism, and neocolonialism while spotlighting less-discussed topics that push the boundaries of critical thought. Particular attention will be given to the transformative potential of critical management education and scholarship. Join us to celebrate the diverse spectrum of CMS scholarship, reflect on its achievements, and envision its future in promoting emancipation and social transformation. This plenary aims to inspire collaborative dialogue and invigorate our shared commitment to build more equitable and environmentally just societies.

CMS PLENARY MEET THE EDITORS: EXPLORING PUBLISHING OPPORTUNITIES IN CMS - QROM, ORGANIZATION, MANAGEMENT LEARNING, JBE AND AMLE

Session 25162: Monday July 28th, 4:00 - 5:30 PM CEST, Bella Center: MR 180

The Critical Management Studies (CMS) division of the Academy of Management is happy to offer a plenary session with the following leading journals AMLE, JBE, Management Learning, Organization, QROM and JBE as a way to engage its community with leading journals in our broad field. This Meet the Editors session offers an invaluable opportunity to connect with leading journal editors and gain a deeper understanding of publishing within the CMS field. It is an opportunity for our community to get closer to journals that are publishing leading critical scholarship. Editors will share insights into their editorial priorities, submission processes, and strategies for navigating peer review. The session will be tailored for all career stages. With a focus on challenging mainstream approaches to management and fostering scholarship that critically examines organizations, power dynamics, and societal inequalities, CMS provides a vibrant space for unconventional, theoretically rich, and socially impactful research.

CMS BUSINESS MEETING

Session 25166: Saturday July 26th, 10:00 - 11:30 AM CEST, Bella Center: MR180

Meet colleagues and the CMS Division Executive, discuss the current state of the division and future plans, and celebrate division prize winners in the division business meeting.

CMS DIVISION STUDENT AND EARLY CAREER SCHOLAR CONSORTIUM

Session 25167: Friday July 25th, 8:30 - 10:30 AM CEST (GMT +2). Bella Center: Hall B- B6-m4.

The Critical Management Studies Division Doctoral Student and Early Career Scholar Consortium offers PhD students at any stage in their program and early career scholars a space to explore and discuss critical scholarship and connect with like-minded individuals. This session provides a great opportunity for participants to share knowledge and contribute to the discussion about critical management studies research, teaching, and engagement.

The AOM Annual Meeting can be a wild ride. Between heading from one room to another, discussing new developments in research, dealing with jet lag and trying to spend time in a whole new city, everything can get a little overwhelming. Sometimes you need to stop running and get together with colleagues and friends, reconnect with one another, perhaps make some new friends and research buddies along the way. Maybe you want to try some of the cuisine that Copenhagen is famous for while you're in the city? Or perhaps you need to relax and unwind at the end of a long day, right? Don't worry, the CMS division has you covered!

CMS SOCIAL

Session 25161: Saturday July 26th, 6:30 - 8:30 PM CEST (GMT + 2). Offsite, Apollo Bar.

Join friends and colleagues for a buffet dinner and a drink at the Apollo Bar, a museum restaurant located in the courtyard of the Kunsthal Charlottenborg, the official gallery of the Royal Danish Academy of Art. Apollo Bar is run by chef and restaurateur Frederik Bille Brahe and features locally sourced vegetarian options.



CMS KEYNOTE 2025

Session 25163: CMS Keynote: Back To Business! Or, Why I'm Trying To Reinvent Myself as an Organizational Ethnographer

Monday, July 28, 2025, 5:30 - 7:00PM CEST (GMT+2)

Bella Center: Hall B- B3-m9

Critique is the pride and glory of Critical Management Studies, but we seldom make much of a splash beyond the own tribe. In this talk, Professor Torkild Thanem will discuss why critical management scholars may do well to spend more time inside the capitalist business organizations that so often are the targets of our critique.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER: PROF. TORKILD THANEM



Prof. Torkild Thanem is the Professor of Work Life Research at the School of Business and Law, University of Agder, Norway and a Visiting Professor of Management and Organization Studies, Stockholm Business School, Stockholm University, Sweden.




Torkild is particularly interested in how people within and around organizations express and experience their bodily selves, how they relate to the embodied identities of other people, and how they deal with prevailing pressures and expectations in organizational life. This raises political and ethical questions around what it means to work in contemporary organizations – how our lives and bodies are managed, and how we might pursue joyful relations with others in concord with, or in conflict with, organizational structures and cultures. In his previous research, Torkild has explored these questions in the realms of workplace health promotion, consultancy firms, transgender politics, leadership, and urban planning. With funding from the Swedish Research Council, he is currently completing an ethnographic study about the performance culture in Swedish sportswear company Björn Borg. His most recent book is *Embodied Research Methods* (with David Knights, published by Sage in 2019).

Torkild's research areas are corporate performance cultures; workplace health promotion; leadership; transgender; embodied methods; organizational ethics.



AOM 2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS




PDW: ROOTED RESISTANCE: ADVANCING THE LITERATURE ON RACE, GENDER, AND SELF-PRESENTATION:

 Saturday, July 26, 2025
 10:30 AM – 12:30 PM CEST (GMT+2)
 Bella Center, Hall B – B3-m9

This PDW builds on our symposium last year and highlights the global and intersectional experiences of scholars navigating the politics of professionalism-from hair and clothing to cultural and embodied expression-and how these intersect with workplace norms and hierarchies.

It is co-sponsored with the DEI and OB divisions.

PDW: MEETING THE FUTURE: DEBATING HOW WE THINK, RESEARCH AND TEACH ENTREPRENEURSHIP:

 Friday, July 25, 2025
 11:15 - 13:45 CEST (GMT+2)
 Bella Center: Hall D- D1-m1

Although entrepreneurship has long been considered the armed wing for creating the future, there is less and less consensus on the hegemonic conceptualization of entrepreneurship. Futures, an interdisciplinary and holistic branch of the social and management sciences holds that there is no predetermined future, but that a range of plausible futures can be explored and ultimately be created.

This PDW sets the stage for a turning point. Mobilizing concepts, activities and tools from futures thinking and practice, participants will be positioned to use these to question and ultimately re-imagine entrepreneurship.

To do this, our PDW will have two parts. In the first, experts will deliver a pecha kucha talk related to their expertise at the crossroads of futures and how it challenges, rejuvenates or nuances existing views on entrepreneurship. In the second, the attendees will have the opportunity to engage in a collective discussion moderated by entrepreneurship scholars, with the aim of identifying fault lines and bridges between these two fields.




This session will provide a renewed connection between the fields of entrepreneurship and futures, rejuvenating or augmenting cross-fertilization and a stage where established meets emerging. Our hope is that the discussions thus created will trigger thought and action towards evolving entrepreneurship as a future-oriented area of scholarship and practice.



AOM 2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

PDW: ROLE OF THE BUSINESS ACADEMIC IN THE FACE OF EXISTENTIAL CRISES: SESSION 20041:

We invite you to attend our PDW titled "Role of the Business Academic in the Face of Existential Crises". We plan to develop a manifesto and action plan for change that is proportional to the grand challenges and force change at scale, scope, and urgency...

 Sunday, July 27, 2025
 14:30 - 16:00 CEST (GMT+2)
 Bella Center: Hall A- A1-m3

In light of the current existential polycrisis that threatens the planet and all its inhabitants, we take a long, hard, and critical view of ourselves to examine the role we have played as business academics in causing and perpetuating this crisis. We are deeply concerned that, even though there have been many calls for urgent action, key indicators make it abundantly clear that an extremely dystopian world looms, unless we launch a proportionate response to the grand challenges of our time. The irony is that we educate the youth to perpetuate the polycrisis that threatens their own futures! This PDW calls business school academics to rise up to the challenges and develop a manifesto and action plan for change that is proportional to the grand challenges and force change at scale, scope, and urgency by countering the dominant and powerful forces that work hard to maintain the status quo.

Please share this invitation with your networks. While we do not require registration, we would greatly appreciate you indicating your interest by visiting cdmcd.co/yKAw6M and adding it your program.




Warm regards,
Gerard Farias, Suneetha Saagurthi, Christine Farias, Sanjeeb Kakoty and Paul Shrivastava

Co-sponsored with the SIM and MED divisions; More info at cdmcd.co/yKAw6M



AOM 2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

PANEL: WHAT DO ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY MEAN IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD?

 Monday, July 28, 2025
 12:00 - 13:30 CEST (GMT+2)
 Bella Center: MR7

Sustainability has been historically taught and researched from a white Western and colonial perspective. This symposia seeks to elevate a more expansive array of voices on sustainability scholarship. Understanding the meaning of environmental and social sustainability in non-Western contexts is crucial for advancing both academic research and practical outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, such understanding offers valuable insights for building new theories and refining existing ones, particularly by addressing cultural, institutional, and socioeconomic variations that are often overlooked in Western-centric approaches. From a practical standpoint, this understanding is vital for improving human well-being and addressing global challenges like climate change. Our panelists will address the theme from the perspectives of Colombian, Ugandan, Moroccan, and indigenous worldviews.

Panelists:

Pilar Acosta Ecole polytechnique, France
Rebecca Namatovu Copenhagen Business School, Denmark
Dirk Boehe Africa Business School, Morocco
Joseph Scott Gladstone Washington State U., United States

Facilitator:

Shili Chen Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool U., China

Moderator:

Jacobo Ramirez Copenhagen Business School, Denmark

Co-sponsored with the ONE and SIM divisions

Nancy Landrum
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AOM 2025 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

PDW: WHAT IS CRITIQUE? WHY DO WE ENGAGE IN CRITIQUE? AND HOW CAN THE CRITICAL CAPACITIES OF CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES (CMS) BE STRENGTHENED? SESSION 17427:

In this PDW we explore what can be done to help CMS generate wider impact beyond the CMS community, beyond Management Studies, and beyond the ivory towers of academic institutions.

Join us at: The Sorry State of Critique in Critical Management Studies: What's Wrong and How Can We Fix It? (17427)

When: Sunday, July 27, 2025, 12:30 - 14:30 CEST (GMT+2)

Where: Bella Center: Hall A- A1-m2

We'll dive into the possibilities and limitations of:

Immanent critique, feminist critique and postcolonial critique

Connections between academic research and activism

The importance of getting out of our comfort zones

We'll have interactive break-out sessions to craft future directions of research and practice.

And we'll have contributions from:

Alison Pullen (Macquarie University)

Andre Spicer (City University)

Genevieve Shanahan (University of Cardiff)

Kathleen Hughes (Anglia Ruskin University)

Kathleen Riach (University of Glasgow)

Looking forward to seeing you there,

The organizers: Torkild Thanem (Stockholm University, Shoaib Ul-Haq (University of Greenwich), and Sara Zaeemdar (Newcastle University)

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EARLY CAREER SPOTLIGHT

IRESHA DONMANIGE
FINAL-YEAR DOCTORAL CANDIDATE
UNIVERSITY OF WOOLONGONG, AUSTRALIA

My academic journey has unfolded across multiple geographies and institutional contexts, but what has remained constant is a commitment to understanding how identities are formed, contested, and regulated within organizational life. I began with a foundation in psychology, completing my undergraduate degree at Bangalore University in India, and later earning an MSc in Applied Psychology from Coventry University in the UK. After more than a decade in academia, I am currently a final-year doctoral candidate at the University of Wollongong in Australia.

My background as a transnational scholar from Sri Lanka continues to shape how I think about institutional belonging and academic inquiry. Working across Indian, British, and Australian higher education landscapes has made me acutely aware of the unevenness of recognition, legitimacy, and belonging in institutional settings. These experiences continue to shape how I approach questions of merit, visibility, and exclusion in my research. These cross-contextual teaching experiences, particularly in organizational psychology, played a formative role in shaping my academic orientation toward the politics of identity, work, and institutional power. This drew my attention to how career progression unfolds in neoliberal, meritocratic workplaces, often unevenly for marginalized groups.

My research sits at the intersection of critical management studies, vocational psychology, and intersectionality. Using constructivist grounded theory, I explore how intersecting identities are navigated and negotiated through career progression conversations, particularly for women in STEM who contend with gendered expectations and institutionalized norms.

As I near the completion of my doctoral work in mid-2025, I am looking to expand this research into postdoctoral and teaching opportunities that sustain critical inquiry and inclusive practice. I am especially drawn to academic environments that value critical pedagogy — where teaching is not detached from research but is a site of reflexive engagement, political relevance, and collective transformation. My aspiration is to contribute to a scholarly movement that refuses to treat equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as symbolic or peripheral.

I hope to collaborate with scholars and institutions committed to asking difficult questions, holding power to account, and mentoring the next generation of critical thinkers. It takes courage to stand against institutional inertia, and I draw strength from working among a community of practitioners who not only critique but act. I want my scholarly legacy to reflect not just critical insight, but critical participation — a refusal to be silent in a moment when radical, justice-oriented scholarship is being squeezed. For me, critical scholarship is not only about interrogating dominant systems, but also about imagining more just and inclusive futures — where marginalized voices are not simply accommodated, but centred.



Iresha Donmanige is a final-year Doctoral Candidate at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her research sits at the intersection of critical management studies, psychology and intersectionality. She looks to expand this research into postdoctoral and teaching opportunities that sustain critical inquiry and inclusive practice.

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[linkedin.com/in/iresha-donmanige-895b9676](https://www.linkedin.com/in/iresha-donmanige-895b9676)



CONVERSATIONS THAT RESIST: A COLLECTIVE AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF CRITICAL MANAGEMENT LIVES

BY DANIELA ALIBERTI

The idea for this initiative was born out of conversations I've had with colleagues and friends I deeply respect—those with whom I talk about research even beyond our professional roles as scholars. These conversations do not just take place at conferences, in peer-reviewed journals, or in the classroom, but also in voice notes, phone calls, post-seminar chats, long dinners, and happy hours. These informal moments are often where our most honest reflections live—where critique, care, and rebellion coexist. Within this space, I aim to gather and share excerpts from these dialogues—drawing on conversations I've collected as reflexive notes linked to my research work and personal experience. These reflections focus on themes that matter to our community: **solidarity, decoloniality, contestation, resistance, precarity, institutional violence**, and the **navigation of academic hierarchies**—among many others. I also welcome emerging and underexplored topics, embracing diverse fields and perspectives.

The goal is to document and share these conversations as a form of **collective autoethnography**, highlighting how our personal lives intersect with our scholarly commitments. These aren't merely academic exchanges—they're conversations between friends and companions in struggle, whose words shape how we think, resist, and survive academic life. Some of these dialogues reflect moments of support; others include tension or disagreement. But all are grounded in a desire to reflect together on issues close to our hearts—often the very reasons we began our academic journeys as critical scholars. Inspired by feminist and critical traditions that center storytelling, emotion, and embodiment, this newsletter will reflect a spirit of solidarity, vulnerability, and resistance.

I will curate and host these conversations, beginning with those rooted in my own lived experience and research, and gradually expanding to include voices from across our global CMS network. These dialogues—often located at the heart of our micro-resistance—are a key source of intellectual and emotional inspiration. I hope that sharing them will help us sustain one another in these complex times, when systemic pressures are increasingly intense.

As an Italian feminist academic in my 30s, raised in Salerno—a relatively small town in southern Italy—and living in Milan—one of the big Italian cities—for the past ten years, I've spent the last decade navigating both personal and institutional North-South divides, which continue to shape my research. My current work focuses on systemic inequality among other topics, and this project extends that commitment by foregrounding how critique emerges not only through writing, but also through the conversations we nurture and the ways we care for one another.

Listening to and reflecting on these dialogues is part of the research method I am developing as a critical scholar. It helps me navigate academic environments that don't always allow for a truly critical or collective vision. That's why I want to share excerpts from these conversations—not only between scholars, but also with friends and acquaintances outside academia, whose critical thinking helps me see differently, step outside my disciplinary bubble, reframe ideas, or find the courage to stand by them. These are the people with whom it feels natural to share a draft, vent about peer review frustrations, or celebrate a new project. Throughout, I will intentionally shift between “I” and “we” to reflect its collective autoethnographic nature, honoring both personal experience and shared reflection.

Each part of this series will include: a selection of conversation excerpts accompanied by personal reflections; a brief text that situates the central theme in relation to CMS and broader academic literature; and a closing section to open further dialogue and invite collective echoes, comments and feedback from the community.



CONVERSATIONS THAT RESIST, EPISODE #0 : FEMALE SOLIDARITY AND OUR MICRORESISTANCE



This first contribution (episode #0 of this series) stems from many—indeed, numerous—conversations I have had over the past years with friends, acquaintances, and women colleagues. It is a subject I return to often: I write about it, I read and attend seminars on it, I discuss it whenever I have the opportunity. It continues to occupy my thinking because I continue to encounter it around me: the question of female solidarity.

Retracing a summary of my notes from the past years, **female solidarity** can be referred to as the emotionally grounded, politically conscious alliance among women that challenges patriarchal structures and affirms diverse lived experiences. Rooted in feminist ethnography and autoethnography (Dorion, 2021), it is not merely about shared identity, but about the transformative potential of recognizing difference, emotional honesty, and mutual support as tools for empowerment (Lorde, 1984; Hemmings, 2012). It emerges through personal narrative, writing, and reflection as acts of resistance to exclusion, passivity, and systemic inequality (Abdellatif et al., 2021), forming what Audre Lorde called “a creative force for change” rather than a fixed bond of sameness. In this sense, **female solidarity** is inclusive, affective, and necessarily political.

Grounding this series on episode #0 on this topic is a form of micro-resistance because the conversations and reflections that I will share from time to time are motivating us toward change. The first topic, therefore, is **female solidarity** as a form of micro-resistance, and I would like to explain—through these excerpts and related autoethnographic reflections—what it is for me, for us, why we speak about it, and why I want to write about it. At present, I still cannot offer a single, clear-cut definition, but I feel it around me, despite an initial phase of disillusionment (which was in fact a disillusionment with a very neoliberal idea of empowerment) (Gill, 2017). We feel it in small gestures of micro-resistance: in the support we give each other, in the way we listen to each other, in the informal spaces we create that are free from pressure.

I will provide some examples before presenting a few conversations and exchanges that are meaningful to me and that aim to open up dialogue on a topic I would like to touch upon frequently in this newsletter, as it is interconnected with other themes of the division I intend to address, and not only those related to the topic of the female gender. Such conversations will count as acts of micro-resistance—intentional but modest, everyday yet cumulative, and deeply relational (Sambrook, 2024).

I feel **female solidarity** when, with friends, we take two or even three hours to go out for drinks after work, or after returning to Milan from a business trip, to share what is happening in our lives; or when we call each other or send long voice messages about how we managed a difficult procedure (the darkest side of academic bureaucracy); or in the case of a young colleague who becomes the spokesperson for a presumed case of **competence and legitimacy bias** on behalf of others, seeking useful information to better understand an injustice, even if only formal, experienced in the workplace; but also in phone calls with childhood friends—those who remain after all that has passed—where we talk about our families, our aging parents, and our worries for our loved ones in general; or in conversations where we frankly express our doubts about a partner’s behavior, or about that colleague who looked at us in a way that made us feel uncomfortable. These are examples of micro-resistance. It is what remains to us, while the concept of female solidarity that we had learned and enacted as girls crumbles. But it is important—and the spaces we create with women friends are fundamental to deconstructing and resisting (Martinussen et al., 2020).

CONVERSATIONS THAT RESIST, EPISODE #0 : FEMALE SOLIDARITY AND OUR MICRORESISTANCE



I recall the words of a colleague and friend, around this time last year, after returning from a wonderful research seminar we had attended together. I had shared a very personal episode in front of everyone, seated in a circle, on which I wanted to build a first autoethnographic work. The underlying theme was the end of a childhood friendship, for reasons I was still trying to understand. I became very emotional; my voice trembled as well as my hands. I do not know how it went that day, but I clearly remember (and sometimes replay) a voice message I received from this colleague:

“I saw myself a bit in your story. I had a long-time friend, from age 6 to 20, with whom I’m no longer friends—we don’t talk anymore. There wasn’t a specific moment or argument that ended it, but rather an unspoken distance [she said, in Italian, *un non detto* literally translated as *a not said*]. The relationship crumbled due to many unspoken things, many feelings I also kept to myself.”

My colleague expressed her solidarity by saying: it happened to me too, and I feel like you. And that was meaningful to me. I also often think back to conversations with two dear friends and colleagues—who work across academia and the corporate world—whom I met years ago in a wonderful place, with whom I exchange long messages, but also share dinners at home and out, where we share so much without filters. We always tell each other: we were lucky to find one another, with you I can talk, and things like that. We often talk about our relationship with the Italian academic system, and more broadly what it means to publish in international journals as young women; we talk about our feminism (and we do not all identify as feminists), we talk about the mentorship we received and the one we wish for, about whom to trust and whom not to.

“You are our stronghold.”

“Your work is wonderful and important; you need to be strong and think independently.”

“I’m glad I found you.”

While we are all tired and feel the uncertainty of this system, these conversations among us give us air. I don’t know where I would be without them right now—perhaps on the verge of burnout, or maybe subjugated by logics I don’t agree with, or perhaps both. Instead, I feel like I can make it through thanks to these conversations.

Related to this—though not emerging from an academic setting but rather from a friend from my hometown who works in the corporate world—there’s a sentence I’d like to share here (omitting some of the more personal details). We were talking about the uncertainty surrounding the possibility of starting a family these days, and she told me:

“It comforts me to know I’m not the only one asking myself these questions. I thought I was crazy; I felt inadequate.”

The stage of life we’re in feels significant, as do the times we’re navigating and the experiences we’re sharing. It’s difficult to fully articulate this pervasive sense of uncertainty, yet somehow, in conversation with one another, we manage to name it. This brings us to a generational theme: although we are critical scholars and resist leaning on generational stereotypes, my close circle and I often sense that older generations struggle to understand our uncertainty—why we hesitate to trust the systems and practices that once worked for them (*Did they really work? They seem convinced they did*).

I recall, and took notes on, one conversation in particular. We were sitting at a literary café near home in Milan—very informal—just me and a dear friend who lives closeby, a mutual friend of my partner:

CONVERSATIONS THAT RESIST, EPISODE #0 : FEMALE SOLIDARITY AND OUR MICRORESISTANCE

“So, it depends on the age of the people you're talking to. With the group I'm currently working with, they're all adults ranging from 50 years old and above, actually starting from around 45 and up. They ask, ‘When are you getting married? When are you having kids?’ ‘Oh, but do you know you have a biological clock?’ Like that, they are very direct and have an old-fashioned mentality, typically Milanese.”

And why do you say “typical Milanese,” I mean, does the way they say it seem characterized in a particular way to you?, I ask her.

In the way they say it, they're invasive, but invasive in a somewhat elusive manner as they use it here.”

We talk about age, class differences—elements that often intersect when we think about the people we interact with in our daily lives and in our work. In this discourse, our life in Milan, or having to deal with Milan and the big city to study and eventually work in Italy, often comes up. Today Milan is scorching hot, inhospitable. With these colleagues, we fantasize about leaving someday or finding a way to stay there as little as possible. But Milan has also given us much. How do we feel about it? About Milan, the big neo-liberal, yet progressive, city and what it means to us, I would like to open the next episode of this series.

Conversations like these—and I deliberately began with the theme that serves as the connective tissue for all the reflective work in this newsletter—help me think that **solidarity is not over** (even though I have seen it change in my relationships with other women, and with people around me overall, over time). These conversations help me navigate a suffering I had accumulated, in relation to the neoliberal patriarchal pressures that confuse us and generate misunderstandings—for the sake of control, of course.

SELECTED READINGS

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SURREAL BUT SERIOUS : A COPENHAGEN MERMAID AND A 1920'S CHICAGO GANGSTER ARGUE ABOUT MERITOCRACY



BY KESHAV KRISHNAMURTY

We scholars of Critical Management Studies regularly need to deal with accusations that we're negative, depressing, and pathologically incapable of seeing the positive side of things. To change that, I started a comedic series as an experiment: Surreal But Serious. Comedians make a point about serious matters by creating situations that are surreal, absurd, comical and ridiculous, so why can't we try to do the same? We can have a conversation that is actually amusing to read but without sacrificing meaning.

Now, imagine, if you will, that you're making your way back to your hotel, Airbnb, or perhaps a metro station in Copenhagen. It has been a long evening, perhaps after a social, or after exploring the city's nightlife. The summer dawn is not far off. You need to get some rest before another day of AOM conference sessions. You take the wrong turn by the water and come across a jetty with two people. The light falls on them and you don't believe your eyes : the first person is an Al Capone-era gangster smoking a giant cigar and wearing a pinstripe suit, fedora and Tommy Gun, having traveled through time from the 1920s to 2025 and across the Atlantic from Chicago to Copenhagen. The other, sitting on a waterside rock with her tail flukes elegantly draped over it, is a mermaid. Unlike the iconic Little Mermaid statue, she's quite contemporary: her bathing suit matches the latest fashions of Copenhagen's Gen-Z. (What does a mermaid do for a living? I've no clue!)

Your rational mind presents two possibilities: (1) You're in bed and dreaming already and/or (2) You've had too many shots of cold Akvavit and are seeing gangsters and mermaids instead of blue mice and pink elephants. Nevertheless, you remain rooted to the spot in fascination and disbelief, as both figures begin to argue.

Mermaid: I think present human society does the most harm to itself with meritocracy.

Gangster: Say, I don't get it. I don't see what's wrong with hiring the smartest guys for the job, see? Besides, you get what you pay for, see? Say, why would your fashion designer want to work for you if you paid her the same as everyone else? She'd make off with whoever paid her nicely!

Mermaid: Hiring the smartest guys for a job is one thing, but ranking, sorting, judging people and rewarding them unequally across all society is another. Everyone wants to be a lord and nobody wants to carry a sack, yes, but you're making a world where the rich get richer, they reward themselves and push everyone else down.

Gangster: Say, the world's never been equal, see? Even that jackass Lenin never paid people equal, see?

Mermaid: The world is not equal and maybe it will never be. That's another discussion. But shouldn't it be more equal and shouldn't everyone have enough? Nok er en stor rigdom - enough is great riches, why can't we make sure that everyone has enough when a few have so much more than enough? Why justify making the rich richer?

Gangster: Say, spare me the Danish wisecracks, sister. Say, I can't see what's wrong with earning the good things in life, see? Common chumps live off moneymakers like yours truly like mosquitoes drinking blood, see? People smart enough to make moolah deserve to be rich, see?

Mermaid: Rich people don't "make moolah" by magic, they extract a cut off other people's work. The people whose work earns money are like the donkey that carries the sack of gold but must eat thistles - shouldn't they have more of the wealth they help create? That's the entire principle of redistributive taxation!

Gangster: Say, I came from nothing, see? I made myself big, see? You work smart - instead of giving like an old church lady you take cash and keep it, see? Join the right operation, take your percentage of the action and make yourself the boss, see? Penniless chumps can have none of it! Don't tell me it's wrong - your cake-eating government's the biggest mob in town and they take their percentage from losers, see?

Mermaid: Tyv tænker hvermand stæler...and nobody is so hard upon the poor as the poor man who has come into power. Is it really necessary to treat poverty as a sin, and mock people who work hard just to live? Is it really necessary to become so rich? Who decides all of this? It wasn't you to begin with.

Gangster: Say, it's the people up in society, see? Once you're rich enough, you change who gets rich, see? Say, you could give money to the right fancy university somewhere and get your kids in so they go clean, see?

Mermaid: Even you find the idea of getting your kids into the right university very important? Interesting! And how do you know if these "right" universities choose kids properly? Are these kids entering because they are so smart, or because they simply have better opportunities to get into the "right" places? Should they get jobs that pay so much more than those of kids from the "wrong" universities? How is it just to judge children, teenagers or young adults so unequally? One kid is not bad because another is good - so by what merits are they judged?

Gangster: Say, slow down, sister. If you want to be wise about all that, just ask the smart-aleck professors reading this, they'll tell ya, see?

Mermaid: Deciding who has merit and who does not should not be left to professors alone. Professors do need to talk about it, obviously, because of their place in the system. But it is too important to leave to them alone. It is hard to imagine a world without meritocracy and easy to be trapped in its thinking, but it can't go on like this.

Gangster: Say, suppose you get rid of your merit-shmerit-thingy...you've got nothing in its place, see? Take it from a wise guy - you need to keep the bosses up top, blockheads in the basement, and sort the others, see? If everyone's the same, your fancy society won't function, see?

Mermaid: We create a more equal system, and every one of us will do our own part in making sure that everyone gets what they need. It doesn't need to be perfect, it only needs to be better than the mess that we have now. Maybe entry level positions will be more equal. Maybe there will be a lottery system to get into certain positions. Maybe people in positions of power will have to do more actual public service for those who need it. Or maybe it will just be many little things. Alle Baaden hioffer, as we say - every little thing helps!

Gangster: Say, like that Shakespeare punk said, there's something rotten here if everyone thinks this way, see? It sounds like a lot of blarney - say, give me a plan that works instead of just talking, see?

Mermaid: That's a valid point, I have little in the way of concrete workable ideas. I think the most straightforward thing is to make kids aware that their merit is not necessarily their own, and not to judge those less fortunate than themselves. What is considered merit shouldn't remain controlled by people in power. The conversation about merit should be decided by common people - when the cat and mouse agree, the farmer is powerless. A bold attempt is half success at change - the attempt to change matters even if it doesn't work out.

Gangster: You're a good dame, sweetheart, but those ideas won't wash. Say, I've got to see a man about a dog. Good night, see?

The gangster walks off, not paying attention to you. At this point, you're close to exhaustion and about to fall asleep on your feet. The Mermaid sees you and greets you.

Mermaid: Hej der! Velkommen i København! I see you've been having a good time! My good friend from America will drop you back in your hotel...Kurt, will you please help our friend here? Thank you!

A young man with long hair and dressed in classic grunge fashion emerges from the shadows and politely offers to drop you back at your hotel. Exhausted and weirded out, you gratefully accept the chance of going back with a normal person. He slowly and carefully drives his old car to your hotel. In conversation, it turns out he is passionately opposed to racism, sexism, homophobia and prejudice in all forms. He is quite happy to be with someone like-minded and hopes to see you in Seattle next year. You reach your hotel, and get out with your things...but before you can thank him, he and his car have vanished, like ghosts.



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