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Book Review

Key concepts in critical management studies

Mark Tadajewski, Elizabeth Parsons, Pauline Maclaran and Martin Parker,
Sage Publications Ltd., London, 2011, \$39.95, ISBN-10: 1849205698, 240pp.

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It could be argued that ever since human beings began to formally articulate any notion of *organization* (both as a noun and as a verb), the critique and interlocation of its repressive elements was expressed simultaneously. From slave revolts in Egypt against the Pharaohs down to the attempts by workers across the poorer nations to resist dispossession by multinational corporations (MNCs) in the 21st century, people have given voice to their attempts to resist exploitation and seek labor justice. They sought to articulate their positions in language that called into question the elitist rationality that was trotted out by the dominant classes in the service of the *status quo*. The advent and eventual hegemony of capitalism was presaged in the 19th century by Karl Marx, who put forward a manifesto for those who would soon find themselves under its yoke. In India, Mahatma Gandhi inaugurated his ideas of civil disobedience by organizing indigo farmers against their exploitative firms and managers. As the principles of industrial management began to be codified in the industrial age, different groups articulated their opposition to its exploitative ethos in their own way. To take the example of the USA, one can see labor organizers like Mother Jones, journalists like Upton Sinclair, novelists like John Steinbeck, and social theorists like Harry Braverman (1974) as being part of a tradition of articulated opposition to a social order that sought to portray the exploitative character of capitalism as a natural side-effect of the productive process. Of course, they were heavily outnumbered by their colleagues working on behalf of the bosses, so their writings remained at the periphery of industrial discourse, but the importance of their efforts cannot be discounted.

The best traditions of “critical management studies (CMS)” can be seen as a part of a similar resistance. In the past two decades, a “CMS” tradition has emerged in the discipline of organizational studies, one that seeks to play the role of interlocutor of the management academy. Of course, as I contended earlier, CMS is not to be confused with a critique of managerialism or capitalism, which has a much longer tradition. CMS is a specific academic intervention within the confines of organizational theorizing in the USA and Europe. However, within those spaces, its role is admirable, vital, and growing. Contending that the traditions of management studies are tilted in favor of capitalists, CMS scholars have tried to bring the interests of marginal groups to the mainstreams of organizational discourse. In a relatively short period of time, the CMS community has assembled an impressive

set of institutional accoutrements; it is a full-fledged division at the Academy of Management, runs a few conferences of its own practitioners, has a few respected journals that define themselves as “critical,” and now has been developing a few handbooks of its own, such as the book under review.

The relatively slim volume edited by Mark Tadajewski, Pauline Maclaran, Elizabeth Parsons, and Martin Parker covers over 50 entries, admittedly brief, but each with a recommended reading list of its own. The list of entries might be instructive to someone who is new to CMS: the volume covers accountability, aesthetics, alternative organization, American pragmatism, actor-network theory, bureaucracy, business ethics, capitalism and anti-capitalism, class, colonialism/post-colonialism, commodity fetishism, consumer culture, corporate social reporting, corporate social responsibility, corporation, critical accounting, critical human resource management, critical international management, critical marketing, critical realism, critical theory, deconstruction, dialectics, discourse, environmentalism, feminism, gender, globalization, governmentality, hegemony, hermeneutics, identity, ideology, immaterial labor, labor process theory, managerialism, Marxism and post-Marxism, materiality, McDonaldization, neoliberalism, paradigm, political economy, postmodernism, post-structuralism, power, queer theory, reflexivity, sexuality, subjectivity and subjectivation, surveillance, and utopia/utopianism. This is an impressive list, but somewhat capricious. There may be many, including those in the CMS tradition who may look askance at some entries (is American pragmatism really a part of CMS?) and wonder at some omissions (imperialism, accumulation by dispossession, MNCs, race theories, language, and a number of others come to mind). But the list, despite its contingent nature, is likely to provoke enough discussion and reflection among novice readers to justify the book’s existence.

References

- Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and monopoly capital: The degradation of work in the twentieth century*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Prasad, A. (2011). *Against the grain: Advances in postcolonial organization studies*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press.

About the author

Raza Mir is professor of Management at William Paterson University. His research mainly concerns the transfer of knowledge across national

In spite of the obvious space constraints that the editors labored under, one cannot help but wish that their introduction to CMS had been a little more comprehensive. If this book is aimed at a CMS novice, a trip through its historical antecedents and current challenges would have been useful. Likewise, while they touch upon some of the internal critiques of the CMS tradition (principally an excessive focus on theory and an insufficient commitment to supporting actual resistance to exploitation; and a Western focus that puts poorer nations in the shade), they do not do so sufficiently. Perhaps these are unfair quibbles against a small book with a large mandate, but these are issues that could have been addressed a little more deeply.

The strength of the book is that its entries are quite comprehensive in spite of (or perhaps because of) the space constraints that are demanded of them. They are bound to enthrall the casual visitors to the world of CMS, and provide a lot of room for them to wander through its theoretical labyrinths. Of course, their brevity might simultaneously frustrate the more rigorous theorist. A feminist organizational theorist, for example, would find much that was missing from Jo Brewis and Michele Dowling’s four-page treatise, just as a Marxist theorist might be infuriated by the decision to ask Stefano Harney to lump Marxism and Post-Marxism together in a single entry of similar length. But there are always bigger volumes they can consider. For instance, enthusiasts of the postcolonial tradition may wish to examine Anshuman Prasad’s (2011) latest volume that contains several theoretical and empirical approaches to the postcolonial tradition. This may satisfy their desire for depth, while the book under review does a good job of demonstrating matters of breadth in the emerging and dynamic CMS tradition.

boundaries in MNCs, and issues relating to power and resistance in organizations. He has published in journals from a variety of disciplines, including *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, *Cultural Dynamics*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Business Communication*, *OMJ*, *Organizational Research Methods*, and *Strategic Management Journal*. He is an associate editor of the journal *Organization*. He can be reached at mirr@wpunj.edu.