CALL FOR PAPERS SPECIAL ISSUE OF ORGANIZATION

CRITICAL REALISMS: EMPIRICAL STUDIES OF OPPRESSION, RESISTANCE, AND EMANCIPATION IN ORGANISATIONS

DEADLINE: DECEMBER 31, 2016

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Over the last twenty-five years, critical realism (Archer, 2000; Bhaskar, 1979) has provided an ontological foundation for multi-layered, emergent analyses in organisation studies (Brown, Fleetwood, & Roberts, 2002; Edwards, O’Mahoney, & Vincent, 2014; Fleetwood & Ackroyd, 2004). The ‘critical’ in critical realism concerns ‘the possibility that an explanatory critique of the ways in which structures of power operate in society can be emancipatory’ (Kilduff, Mehra, & Dunn, 2011). Yet, despite this aim, in organisation studies at least, critical realism has rarely fulfilled its potential in explaining sources of oppression and the potential for resistance to, and emancipation from, such oppression. Although many realist studies focus on these themes (for example, Fleetwood, 2005; Newton, 1998; Reed, 2001), there are relatively few examples where an empirical approach is used (for exceptions, see Hart, New, & Freeman, 2004; Jenkins & Delbridge, 2014; Porter, 1993; Vincent, 2005). For the most part, ‘critique’ has involved generating rather detached and passive realist analyses of oppression rather being engaged with processes of emancipation (see Ackroyd and Karlson, 2015).

The absence of realist empirical studies of oppression, resistance and emancipation at work is surprising. By distinguishing the person from structure, discourse or action, critical realists frequently claim a superior basis for understanding resistance than alternative approaches (Reed, 2000). Moreover, critical realism uses a number of concepts, such as emergence, structure, agency, stratification, transitive/intransitive, abduction and retroduction, which are well suited to developing empirical methods which might make a difference (Carter & New, 2004; Edwards et al., 2014; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014; Pawson, 2006). Certainly outside of organisation studies, critical realists have progressed non-relativist theories of embodied, reflexive individuals with a (bounded) capacity to resist material and discursive mechanisms of oppression (Gorski, 2013; Sayer, 2005, 2011; Smith, 2010).

Themes of oppression, resistance and emancipation are, of course, central to a critically-informed organisation studies. The traditional framing of these concepts in Marxist and Labour Process theorising (McCabe, 2011; Thompson & Van den Broek, 2010) have a strong affinity with critical realism (Brown, Fleetwood, & Roberts, 2012; Taylor, 2006; Thompson, 2010). Yet, although these approaches are often defined in opposition to constructivist and post-foundational theorising, we would emphasise the forms of realism that can be found in alternative philosophies. Over the last ten years, for example, a number of authors have sought to emphasise not only the potential of realist approaches to discourse (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 2010; Fairclough, 2005; Thompson & Harley, 2012) and the realist assumptions of many social constructivists (O’Mahoney, 2011). Such work has been paralleled by the re-reading of philosophers such as Foucault, Derrida, Latour and Lacan as realists (Caldwell, 2007; Clarke, 2003; Pearce & Woodiwiss, 2001; Wright, 2004). There are also a variety of realisms that are used to study oppression, resistance and emancipation outside the
Bhaskar / Archer lineage. These are not limited to, but include work based on MacIntyre (Finchett-Maddock, 2015); Polanyi (Levien & Paret, 2012), Bourdieu (Dick, 2008); Nussbaum (Sayer, 2007), and Goffman (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). There are also interesting realist developments on emancipation in the sociology of religion (Wight, 2006).

In line with these developments, this call seeks *empirical* papers that use a realist approach to identify the processes of workplace or organisational oppression, and explain how resistance or emancipation can occur. We encourage new empirical studies using a variety of lenses and research methods, including those that seek to improve upon extant realist theorising in this area.

Specific research questions might include:

- How and why do systems or mechanisms of oppression and emancipation differ in different organisations?
- How is oppression experienced in different organisations and what does this say about the possibilities of emancipation?
- How do different levels interact in producing and diminishing oppression at work?
- What are the conditions of possibility for oppressive mechanisms and the forms of resistance they encounter?
- What levers are available to researchers, policy-makers and practitioners seeking to emancipate actors from relatively oppressive organisational regimes?
- How can historical and material structures be translated into discourses that create workplace resistance and/or conflict?
- How is discursive power at work understood and resisted under a realist framing?
- How can critical realists undertake action research that result in positive consequences for research partners?
- What do these empirical questions mean for critical realist theorising?
- How can emancipatory engagement be undertaken and justified from a realist perspective?

**Submission**
Papers may be submitted electronically from November 31 until the deadline date of December 31, 2016 (final deadline) to SAGETrack at: [http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization](http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/organization)

Papers should be no more than 8,000 words, excluding references, and will be blind reviewed following the journal’s standard review process. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines published in Organization and on the journal’s website:

[http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission](http://www.sagepub.com/journals/Journal200981/manuscriptSubmission).

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