



Agora

Organization Studies
2023, Vol. 44(2) 299–346
© The Author(s) 2022



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/01708406221131413
www.egosnet.org/os



Editorial: Reflections on Organizing in/for Peace and War Times

Renate E. Meyer and Paolo Quattrone

When we launched our Agora section a year ago, we emphasized the need for *Organization Studies* to engage in a timely manner with the most pressing issues of our time. Among these issues are the wars that are currently affecting the lives of millions across the world and the need for creating pathways that make peace possible. We witness a fragmentation of institutional orders; this fragmentation leaves cracks, fractures and indeed wounds, but it may also create interstices, opportunities, openness and hope. Both peace and war have important organizing dimensions and invite reflections from an organizational perspective. We believe that as organization scholars, we need to rise to the challenge and attend to the contexts, meanings, processes, and materialities at the core of these phenomena.

It was in this spirit that we approached a number of scholars who had worked on issues directly and indirectly related with this themed Agora section. Others were recommended to us and joined the league of authors. All belong to the growing *Organization Studies* community, which is diverse and praises difference: difference in theoretical and methodological approaches, in backgrounds, in orientation, and also in standpoints. We are grateful to them for taking on the task, which was not an easy one especially because this also meant to share with the readers not only research-based insights, but personal histories, experiences, and views.

As you will read in the various pieces of this section, the authors have taken quite different routes: Some of them have lived war on their skin as individuals or as researchers. Some reflect on the context and variables that create the conditions for both peace and war; others reflect on methodological issues and the challenge of conducting research in war-torn times. Some pose the question of whether our modes and styles of writing and theorizing are appropriate for exceptional circumstances. Many raise questions that we need to address, share insights from their own empirical research, and offer reflections on how to deal with war-related crises institutionally and pragmatically, discuss the role of the State, politics, individuals and communities in getting out of the *impasse*. Some have used this as an opportunity for normative, political statements. Yet others take a more activist stance and demand that we leave the library and desks and actively contribute to changing the adverse circumstances. We have decided to include a broad spectrum of voices, because it is our belief that especially when controversies are unsettled, there is a need for debate and for hearing also the voices with which one may disagree.

Agora are opinion essays. They are not research articles; they are not reviewed. Beyond the diverse takes on the topic itself, this collection helps us to reflect on a series of issues that are usually hidden behind the structure and arguments of our standard article formats and publishing processes, yet are relevant to any academic work. It makes visible our different roles in society (when do we speak as researchers? when do we speak as citizens, as human-beings, and when as political actors? to what extent is it legitimate to mix these roles?). It allows a glimpse on challenges and tensions, for us as scholars, our work, and also for the editors of academic journals, that result from these multiple roles and diverse experiences. This themed section operates in that liminal space between academic and other roles, and it rests upon us the task to negotiate the boundaries. Where is the boundary, for instance, between academic critique and political criticism? When speaking about war, should we invoke the freedom of prose and poetry, or do we, by being scholars, need to stick to the rigorous academic writing canons? How to ensure that our actions and words create the conditions for a dialogue rather than its closure? Boundaries that are difficult to patrol when the issue at stake is organizing for peace and war.

We asked our contributors to voice their opinions and concerns rather than share research output. We sincerely hope that you, our readers, and the *Organization Studies* community appreciate their efforts; that you will be inspired to work on the topics that they raise and reflect on the issues and contradictions that they highlight and imply.

Lipstick on the Pig

Richard O'Quinn*

He'd been given another mission, another bag of money, and the same nebulous guidance to "do his best." While the latitude and trust were exhilarating, the responsibility weighed more heavily than any rucksack. Years on, he was still amazed his government would launch him and his teammates into situations where no official government policy stance existed, no end state was imagined. They half-jokingly called themselves "initiators"—a metaphor for the fuses on explosive devices. Put in harm's way to make something happen, they were like the war pigs of ancient times doused in oil, set alight, and sent screaming towards the enemy. Now he and his comrades, roused with patriotism and alight with the fury of justice, were unleashed to dispatch their enemies. But in silence. War was rarely ever as good as advertised.

Danger was real, extreme, and ever present. He'd lost many comrades, several recently. One bled out while fighting off a hoard of attackers, another tripped an explosive while exfiltrating from an objective, and yet another was killed while he ate his lunch, through the applied lunacy of a suicide bomber. Some incidents seemed random, others not, like when one buddy was followed for several hours and then jumped in an alleyway. Somehow, he disarmed one attacker who'd shot him in the back and after firing his newly acquired weapon into both assailants, he calmly walked down the street, leapt a wall, and made his way out of country alone with a bullet gnawing in his gut and a search party stalking him. Or like when another buddy was sleeping and four bastards chipped a hole in the exterior brick wall of his safehouse, slithered through, and attacked him with machetes and bats. This trooper fought them off bare-handed in his bedroom, his rage somehow persuading them to abandon their efforts. So much blunt trauma caused his brain to swell, and the resulting

*Lecturer in management and leadership at the University of Queensland, c.oquinn@uq.edu.au. Find him and others at bohemianwritersclub.org.