

Editor's Introduction

Over recent years, one can readily observe an increase in references to the idea of “crisis.” Whether it’s the financial crisis of 2008 and its wide-ranging effects, the increasingly apparent and urgent environmental crisis and climate-related disasters, or the various manifestations of a social crisis of entrenched, systematic inequality that threatens an ever-widening population, many have come to see this time as one marked by uncertainty and threat.

World-systems scholars have much to say about the notion of crisis, and the approach stands out among theories of social change in helping account for today’s predicaments. To advance public and scholarly reflection on the sources and possible responses to the major dilemmas our society now faces, this issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* features a symposium which began as a panel at the recent [Political Economy of the World-System Section of the American Sociological Association](#) mini-conference in New York City in August. We’re excited to bring to our readers the latest thinking about these inter-connected crises from leading scholars, including [Christopher Chase-Dunn](#), [Leo Panitch](#), [Thomas Reifer](#), [William I. Robinson](#), and [Saskia Sassen](#). These essays help situate understandings of global crisis within a world-systemic perspective, offering insights into nature and sources of the interconnected global crises and responses to crises being put forward by elites and by popular movements.

The world-historical perspective offered by the world-systems tradition also encourages us to reflect on how our own thinking and theorizing is shaped by the very processes we are trying to understand. In light of this, Gregory Williams reports on an interview he conducted with Immanuel Wallerstein in which Wallerstein reflected on the origins of his writings on the Modern World-System, including some of the intersections of his personal experiences in the academy at a time of major upheaval and, indeed, crisis. We are pleased to offer our readers this sort of window on the tradition of world-systems scholarship and hope it can encourage new thinking about the intersections of world-history and knowledge production. We also hope that special features like this can encourage a new generation of readers, practitioners, and scholars to engage with the world-systems tradition.

The research articles we present with this issue complement the symposium by exploring in depth some of the arguments put forward by the symposium authors. Leading off is an article by [William K. Carroll and J.P. Sapinski](#), which documents the development of what they call “transnational alternative policy groups,” (TAPGs) that help advance networks that support the generation of knowledge and modes of thinking that can challenge the hegemony of global capitalism. Using network analysis, these authors examine major TAPGs, showing how TAPGs are helping form a *counter-hegemonic historical bloc*, performing important brokerage roles to bridge diverse movements as well as the North-South divide. TAPGs, they argue, stand out among international nongovernmental organizations in their ability to bring together highly diverse networks. At the same time, individual TAPGs vary in their relations with inter-governmental organizations and in their ability to bridge geographic and other differences.

Roy [Kwon’s article](#) offers an important contribution to existing scholarly and policy debates about the effects of trade liberalization policies on countries’ abilities to advance economic development goals. While policy makers have pressed low-income countries to reduce tariffs in order to boost their international trade and development, the evidence of whether such policies have the intended effect is ambiguous at best. Kwon focuses on those counties at the

periphery of the world-economy, since such countries' embeddedness in the world-system differs from those with higher incomes. His analysis shows that these countries' domestic policies interact with tariffs to account for the variable development outcomes. Specifically, countries with higher domestic investment and labor force participation and *higher* tariffs saw the most economic growth – a finding that contradicts the conventional neoliberal assumptions about the relationships of all of these factors to economic development. Such contradictions between the expectations of neoliberal economic theory and the lived experiences of people in the periphery of the world-economy help account for the multiple crises examined in our symposium.

[Jonathan Leitner](#)'s historical analysis examines the historical transitions between prestige-goods trade networks and bulk goods networks in Northeastern North America to show how the configurations of these networks affected competition between colonial powers vying for control over the region and its resources. The analysis shows how the strategic choices and alliances of colonial authorities impacted their prospects for securing a place on the continent. Moreover, Leitner's analysis shows the important interconnections between the material foundations of colonial economies, their social and military relations, and their political success.

[Patrick Ziltener and Daniel Künzler](#) conclude the article section with a comprehensive review essay of the large and multidisciplinary body of research on the various impacts of colonialism on post-independence states of Africa and Asia. Their review highlights the complex and multidimensional influences of colonial legacies and the variety of ways scholars have sought to measure and evaluate these influences. In addition, they consider how research informs understandings of how the long-term effects of colonialism differ according to national context.

We conclude the issue with a selection of [book reviews](#) of some timely and important contributions to scholarship related to world-systems thinking. As always, we are grateful to our book reviewers and to our many external reviewers who helped us bring this fine collection of scholarship to our readers.

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