



JOURNAL OF WORLD-SYSTEMS RESEARCH

ISSN: 1076-156X | Vol. 23 Issue 1 Pages 1-4 |
DOI 10.5195/JWSR.2017.708 | jwsr.org

Editors' Introduction

Jackie Smith

Jennifer Bair

Scott Byrd

Caitlin Schroering

This issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* reaches our readers at a particularly challenging world-historical moment. As we watch unfolding news about the policies of the Trump administration and its supporters, it is helpful to situate these events in the larger framework that world-systems analysis provides. We hope readers will take some time to reflect on some of the past content of this journal as it speaks to the nature of the systemic crises we face today (see, for instance, our 2013 symposium, "[The Global System since 2008: Crisis of What](#)"). We believe that the contributions in this issue can also contribute to new understandings of these crises and of possible responses that can advance a more humane and sustainable world-system.

Most of our readers will agree that we are witnessing world-systemic processes of U.S. hegemonic decline and rising competition for dominance in the global political and economic orders. As William I. Robinson points out in [a recent essay](#), the tensions we're seeing between the United States and China reflect the fact that U.S. hegemony is based on the post WWII inter-state order that marginalizes China as a political force. He observes that "the political scaffolding of world capitalism is hopelessly outdated."



New articles in this journal are licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 United States License.



This journal is published by the [University Library System](#), [University of Pittsburgh](#) as part of its [D-Scribe Digital Publishing Program](#) and is cosponsored by the [University of Pittsburgh Press](#).

Two articles in this issue are instructive for our thinking about China's role in the changing world-system, and they can inform our understandings of the current context of growing tensions. In their opening article, "Territorial Contradictions of the Rise of China: Geopolitics, Nationalism and Hegemony in Comparative-Historical Perspective," Sahan Savas Karatasli and Sefika Kumral point out that "Unlike the rise of the United Provinces, the United Kingdom and the United States, however, China's ascendancy does not coincide with attempts to restructure the existing configuration of the inter-state system. On the contrary,...China has been preoccupied with providing stability and preserving the global status quo." They attribute China's deviation from the pattern of past hegemonic transitions to the challenges it faces from the escalation of nationalist and secessionist movements within its boundaries.

While the conclusion drawn by Karatasli and Kumral directs our attention to the question of what is different about today's hegemonic transition from earlier ones, the other papers in this issue address the broader structural changes in the world-system that impact today's crises. Clearly, the spread of the military-industrial complex and unprecedented militarization of states is one critical difference affecting the distribution of power and the possible responses to systemic crisis. In "Intrastate Dynamics in the Context of Hegemonic Decline: A Case Study of China's Arms Transfer Regime," Zhifan Luo examines China's arms transfer activities, arguing that in more recent years we've seen a global strategy that attempts to extend China's economic, political, and possibly military outreach in areas where U.S. influence is weak.

Another key difference between the current world-historical moment and previous ones is the concentration of transnational corporate power and the consolidation of what analysts have referred to as the transnational capitalist class (TCC). As [Robinson \(2017\)](#) points out, Chinese elements of the TCC have been influential in shaping China's global policy. Moreover, "the emerging TCC [has] acquired a stake in the stability and well-being of global capitalism." It may well be that corporate rather than state actors are the decisive players shaping the struggle to define the global political and economic order. In light of this, Jeb Sprague's "The Caribbean Cruise Ship Industry and the Emergence of a Transnational Capitalist Class" advances understandings of how this class has consolidated its influence in the cruise ship industry and how it wields its power over both states and people.

Is there hope? There is a third important structural change in the world-system that will impact how various actors respond to the deepening crises, and that is the strengthening of counter-hegemonic and anti-systemic movements. Anti-colonial struggles helped inform transnational alliances and visions among movements, which have long sought to advance alternatives to the global capitalist order (see Wallerstein's "[Antisystemic Movements, Yesterday and Today](#)"). The restructuring of global labor markets, new communications technologies, and proliferation of transnational alliances and campaigns resisting the ravages of neoliberal policies have

strengthened antisystemic movements. Moreover, the ideas these movements advance challenge the ideological foundations upon which the legitimacy and stability of the current order rests. Advancing notions of liberty, equality, freedom, and human rights, activists point to contradictions between the purported values of our society and the outcomes of global capitalist policies.

World-systems scholarship thus includes work that explores world-systemic alternatives and their possibilities for emergence. Rebekah Burroway's "Political Economy, Capability Development, and Fundamental Cause: Integrating Perspectives on Child Health in Developing Countries" argues for greater attention to the human impacts of capitalism, making the case for the concept of "fundamental cause" in research on public health. Her paper should advance trans-disciplinary dialogues and encourage scholars working on public health questions to consider the influences of broader structural forces on the conditions that yield poor health outcomes. Burroway's project is, we believe, a critical one in this moment of world-historical crisis, where we see increasing pressures placed on the factors of social reproduction—in other words threats to the very survival of humankind.

Jeffrey A Ewing's paper, "Hollow Ecology: Ecological Modernization Theory and the Death of Nature" also points to the need for our research to confront more rigorously the dark realities of capitalism's social and ecological crises. As his title suggest, the essay critiques approaches to environmental analysis that ignore the very real material constraints of the physical environment and makes a compelling case for the critical application of world-historical analysis to the study of environmental issues. By challenging the dominant discourses of climate denial and technological optimism and giving voice to the unavoidable reality of capitalism's ecological crisis, scholars can help advance new thinking about alternative social and economic orders that will provide for the needs of future generations of all species.

Finally, we are exceptionally pleased to offer an excellent research note in which Patrick Ziltener, Daniel Künzler, and André Walter introduce new empirical tools for measuring the impacts of colonialism. Given contemporary debates about race and its historical basis in global capitalist oppression (See, e.g. *JWSR's* recent [symposium on race in the capitalist world-system](#)), these methodological innovations should spur important new critical research that highlights yet another hypocrisy in the existing world-system's geoculture. To help advance research on the long-term structural impacts of colonialism, these authors have made their data available to other scholars, and readers will find a direct link to the dataset along with the article.

Our book review section features a review symposium of Jamie McCallum's book, *Global Unions, Local Power: The New Spirit of Transnational Labor Organizing*, which received the Distinguished Scholarly Book Award from the Labor and Labor Movements Section of the American Sociological Association. In addition to reviews from Fabiola Mieres, Stephanie Luce, Joel Stillerman, and Sarah Swider, the symposium features an essay by the author, Jamie

McCallum, who revisits his arguments about the political possibilities for effective transnational organizing in light of the changing political context confronting organized labor, particularly in the U.S. under the new administration. As always, please keep us informed about new books that are appropriate for review in *JWSR*. And if you know of foreign-language books that you believe would be of interest to *JWSR*'s readership, or if you would like to offer your services to review books in a foreign language, please contact our book review editor, Jennifer Bair at jlb5md@virginia.edu.

In closing, we remind our readers that the *Journal of World-Systems Research* remains one of the leading open access peer reviewed scholarly journals, and we are working to create a sustainable structure for the journal while supporting the Open Access movement more broadly. We invite readers to support the journal with financial contributions (see the "donate" link on our website), by promoting the journal to readers and scholars, or by assisting with copyediting or translating (email jwsr@pitt.edu to volunteer). As we witness new threats to free speech and democratic, truthful communications, [scholars and readers play a critical role](#) in helping keep access to information open and free. As one of the very first open access scholarly journals, *JWSR* is committed to helping our readers be part of the movement to keep our research free, truthful, and open to all readers.

Reference

Robinson, William I. 2017. "China and Trumpism: The Political Contradictions of Global Capitalism." Telesur. Retrieved: February 20
<http://www.telesur.tv/english/opinion/China-and-Trumpism-The-Contradictions-of-Global-Capitalism-20170214-0002.html>.