



## Editors' Introduction

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Recent months have drawn wider attention to the substantial impacts of transnational corporations on our democracies. The unprecedented inter-urban competition launched by Amazon in the fall of 2018 shed light on the pervasiveness and extensiveness of public subsidizing of transnational corporations and the resulting costs to local communities. In many locales, the details of local bids to become the site of Amazon's second headquarters were withheld (often illegally) from the public and even from elected officials. At the same time, more details continue to emerge linking the social media giant, Facebook, with serious breaches of data privacy and systematic manipulation of users for political and commercial ends.

Today corporations are far more powerful than local and even many national governments, and this poses huge threats to human rights and democracy.<sup>1</sup> The present issue of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* highlights this problem with a special symposium on Corporate Power and Local Democracy, guest edited by Ben Manski. Symposium contributors identify

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<sup>1</sup> A 2016 study by Global Justice Now! showed that of the world's top 100 economies, 69 were corporations and just 31 were national governments. When we look at the top 200 economies, 153 are corporations (<https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/news/2016/sep/12/10-biggest-corporations-make-more-money-most-countries-world-combined>). These trends toward concentration have been increasing each year, signaling how wealth accumulation processes contribute to monopolies and extreme inequalities.



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contemporary struggles to resist corporate control of water and to defend the environment, and they describe people-centered alternatives to corporate ownership. Indeed, while mass media headlines and popular discourse focus on corporate agendas and on exclusionary populist movements, our symposium authors highlight some of the many examples of how people are working together to build solidarity across locales, between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, and across other social and cultural divides. By considering how the global capitalist system shapes power and political contestation within countries, we can better understand how popular movements can work to alter the world-systemic dynamics and advance the politics of emancipation and environmental sustainability. We hope these essays inspire further dialogue and research on these themes.

Our research articles offer some important contributions to world-systems scholarship. In “Puzzling Politics: A Methodology for Turning World-Systems Analysis Inside-Out,” Leslie C. Gates and Mehmet Deniz put forward a novel way of thinking about the relationships between global and national politics. With a world-historical lens, we can see today’s polarized electoral and political struggles as both shaping and being shaped by the global erosion of liberal democratic institutions and the policies of neoliberal globalization. Yet, as Gates and Deniz observe, much of the popular discourse as well as research in historical sociology treats these as national ‘puzzles’—that is, problems to be explained within the framework of national cultures and politics. To bridge the conversations between diverse scholarly traditions, they offer a methodology that considers how global forces operate from the ‘inside-out,’ helping to situate these supposedly national puzzles within their world-historical context and illustrating how inter-connected national and global processes “co-constitute the world-economy.” They review some key studies to illustrate applications of world-systems research that help demonstrate how researchers can better “take [national] political conjunctures and their relationship to global capitalism seriously.”

John M. Shandra, Michael Restivo and Jamie M. Sommer’s “Do China’s Environmental Gains at Home Fuel Forest Loss Abroad?” applies the concept of unequal ecological exchange to a cross-national analysis of how China’s recent efforts to reverse deforestation within its borders and to “green” its industries impact the health of the forests of its trading partners. Their findings show how world-system processes of peripheralization operate. As China’s economic advancement creates new pressures to improve its domestic environmental practices, environmental costs are externalized to lower-income countries. Thus, while China can boast successful reforestation programs, these come at a cost to forests and people abroad.

Márton Demeter provides an insightful critique of the “world-system of knowledge production,” considering the processes that contribute to the concentration of academic privilege and power in core regions, and the ways particular institutions and practices help reproduce core-periphery inequalities and exclude voices of scholars from outside the core. This paper was

particularly interesting to us as editors of a scholarly journal that critiques world-system inequalities and yet that operates within a highly unequal and competitive academic environment—one that serves the interests of existing hegemonic interests. We were reminded of the critical importance of open access journals, including *JWSR*, which make an intentional commitment to challenging world-systemic inequalities not only by providing free access to scholarly content, but also striving to help non-core authors extend their academic audiences. This requires deliberate investments of time and resources to ensure more equitable peer-review processes and to translate and edit contributions to maximize their scholarly impact. It also means resisting a dominant academic publishing model that is, nevertheless, coming under increasing scrutiny. Among a number of recent challenges to commercial publishers, the University of California (UC) system decided not to renew its contract with Elsevier after the company refused to negotiate an agreement that would have allowed research published by UC authors to be available to all readers without charge.<sup>2</sup>

In his contribution, “Contending with Capitalism: Fatwas and Neoliberal Ideology,” Omar Awass interrogates the idea that the “economic sphere is to be differentiated from the social world and governed by its own rationality that is distinct from religious, ethical, social, or political considerations.” Using a Polanyian lens, he illustrates how Islamic norms have shaped particular financial practices and institutions, despite centuries of capitalist development. He shows how the formal issuance of fatwas by the Muslim World League and the Organization of Islamic Conference shape contemporary practices and offer “discursive competition” that “challenges neoliberal capitalist ideology by embedding religious ethics in economic discourse.” By institutionalizing and preserving ethically-based alternatives to globalized capitalism, these Islamic institutions support practices that can help mitigate problems in the operation of global capitalism, such as the instabilities in global finance that contributed to the 2008 financial collapse.

The World-Historical Information section has become an established feature of *JWSR*. As with the last two issues, forthcoming issues of *JWSR* will feature reviews of world-historical data resources, peer-reviewed articles that make substantial use of world-historical information, and documentation and discussion about the content and methods by which such datasets have been developed. We encourage readers to submit ideas and proposals for content in this newly introduced section of our journal, and we note how valuable this content can be to the larger goal of creating a more inclusive and equitable world-system of knowledge production.

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<sup>2</sup> See: “UC Terminates Subscriptions with World’s Largest Scientific Publisher in Push for Open Access to Publicly Funded Research” At: <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/press-room/uc-terminates-subscriptions-worlds-largest-scientific-publisher-push-open-access-publicly>. (More resources on UC’s Open Access policies are at: <https://osc.universityofcalifornia.edu/open-access-at-uc/publisher-negotiations/uc-and-elsevier/>).

In our review section we pay tribute to the memory of R. Scott Frey, a long-time editorial board member of the *Journal of World-Systems Research* and a pioneer in the use of world-systems theory to help uncover the sources of environmental destruction and persistent environmental inequalities. Scott's continuing influence is evident throughout this issue: He was a reviewer of the paper by John Shandra and colleagues, and he provided important substantive feedback that helped strengthen the article you see in this issue. Frey also consistently stressed the crucial problem of corporate power and the importance of popular resistance, and our symposium on corporate power and local democracy reflects themes that were common in his research and teaching. As David Pellow observes,

Frey's body of work has advanced the fields of world-systems theory and environmental sociology because it skillfully explores the violence of militarism and the brutality of capitalism and economic globalization, while also making clear that positive and transformative social change is possible when independent, grassroots movements mobilize within and across international borders.

Furthermore, Frey's attention to the "multiscalar dynamics of environmental justice conflicts" (Pellow) resonates with Gates and Deniz's "inside-out" approach to world-systems analysis. We are pleased to offer essays by Paul Gellert and Kelly Austin alongside David Pellow's tribute to Frey's work and his influence as a colleague and mentor. We are grateful to these authors for pulling together their contributions to the symposium on such short notice, following Frey's untimely passing in December 2018. One of Scott Frey's final projects was a co-edited volume (with Paul Gellert and Harry Dahms), *Ecologically Unequal Exchange: Environmental Injustice in Comparative and Historical Perspective*, which will be reviewed in an upcoming issue of *JWSR*.

This issue of *JWSR* also offers our usual assortment of reviews covering books ranging from the experiences of Palestinians employed in Israeli settlements and Nepalese migrants working in New York City and Boston, to the private governance of land and labor in global industries, to trade in ancient Eurasia. As always, we'd like to thank the reviewers who agree to undertake this underappreciated but important scholarly task, and the authors and reader who recommend titles for us to review.

As we close this introduction, we remind our readers that the *Journal of World-Systems Research* is one of the most established open access peer reviewed scholarly journals. We acknowledge the important work our readers do as a collective of scholars to provide high-quality research articles and to engage in the essential (if largely unrewarded) task of peer reviewing. To remain viable as a free and open access journal, we rely on all of you to help support our work and expand our readership. As editor-in-chief Jackie Smith pointed out in a recent contribution to the newsletter of the Political Economy of the World-System, "We are the ones we've been waiting

for.”<sup>3</sup> To counter corporate concentration in the scholarly publishing industry and transform the highly unequal world-system of knowledge production, we need to mobilize more people, energy, and support for the work of transforming the academy. And of course this work is indispensable to the transformation of the larger world-system. Helping draw attention to the struggles of leaders from the global South to advance a “New Information and Communication Order,” and to expand awareness of the UN’s formal recognition in recent years of the human right to internet access are ways teachers and scholars as well as the general public can help serve these goals. In light of this, we remind readers that May 3<sup>rd</sup> is recognized by the United Nations as “[World Press Freedom Day](#),” and given the ways recent political developments have heightened deadly threats to press freedoms, we hope to inspire action that can help counter these trends.

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<sup>3</sup> “[We are the Ones We’ve Been Waiting For: Information, Communication and Today’s Struggles for A Livable World-System](#)” *PEWS News*, Fall 2018.