

# TOWARDS WIDER FRAMINGS: WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS AND FOLKLORE STUDIES

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## ABSTRACT

This article\* situates folklore studies in relation to the approach to social research known as world-systems analysis. In doing so, the work also serves as an evocation of world-systems analysis of potential usefulness for the practice of folklore research and for further thinking about the articulation of the field with others in the human or social sciences. Even if folklorists choose not to embrace a world-systems framework, it is valuable to position folklore studies within the matrix of social science disciplines that this perspective sees as important to the rise of the modern capitalist world-system. This positioning relates to interpretations of world history, but also to debates about the future status of the disciplines. While world-systems analysis is only one among several approaches to exploring the human experience in broad greater-than-local contexts, it offers a useful instance for a larger effort to work out more far-reaching modes of work in folkloristics.

KEYWORDS: history • nationalism • research • theory • social sciences

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*Folklore needs to be examined as a part of the political economy of nations  
and of the world system. (Fine 2009: 103)*

*It is always revealing, if sometimes disconcerting, to know how your colleagues  
in neighboring departments view you. (Wallerstein 2003: 454)*

## INTRODUCTION

While folklorists have cultivated theories and methods of their own, traveling theory and borrowed methods tend to arrive to folklore studies via cultural anthropology or, for some kinds of work, from literary studies.<sup>1</sup> Our friends and key interlocutors in sociology have consistently been influential figures concerned with the interaction order (Goffman 1983) or what sociologist and folklorist Gary Alan Fine (2012) has called “tiny publics.” Our favorite sociologies have been social interactional and sociolinguistic. Our preference for the microsociological can be seen, for instance, in the remarkable staying power of Dan Ben-Amos’ (1971: 13) formulation characterizing the field’s object – folklore – as “artistic communication in small groups.” Even more than in cultural anthropology, folklorists have avoided macrosociology, often knowing relatively little about its varied forms. When it comes to history, our preferences have tended towards cultural history (especially in an ethnological mode), oral history, microhistory, and emplaced social histories of relatively narrow spans of space and time. While we appreciated the way that the *Annales* historians cared about continuities in the everyday lives of non-elite people, as well as their interest in worldview and in topics such as agriculture and practical technologies, we have tended not to produce, or draw much on, the kinds of sweeping histories of the *longue durée* that we associate with their most famous works. Even historical work of any kind has grown less common in American folkloristics as the field there has continued to shift in ways initiated by its performance and communicative turn of the 1960s and 1970s (Williams 2017).

In this context, one might wonder why I am bothering to consider one of the most macrosociological and sweepingly historical perspectives in the social sciences from the vantage point of folklore studies. Few folklorists follow work in world-systems analysis and fewer still draw on it in their own research.<sup>2</sup> My response to this reasonable query has two aspects. One is broad. As students of the human condition, even if our main concerns are oriented toward diversity rather than commonality and are focused on small groups rather than on the global situation, I think that our work will be stronger if we attend, at least with basic awareness, to the other end of these continua. But my reflection also centers on a specific issue, one in which folklorists need to amend a key discussion in world-systems analysis itself.

This lack needing liquidation, concerns the specific place of folklore studies in the historical formation of the social sciences and humanities in Europe in the context of modernization. Because, in a world-systems perspective, the historical rise of the social sciences is closely connected to the development of the modern capitalist world-system, situating folklore studies in its historical European context promises to improve a key understanding in world-systems analysis as developed by its most prominent architect and practitioner, Immanuel Wallerstein (1930–2019). This is not simply a matter of the

history of the social sciences because, in Wallerstein's view, the history of these fields is not only part and parcel of the rise of the capitalist world system, their status is a fundamental matter of debate for the present and the future. As Wallerstein argued for a significant reconfiguring of these fields, it would be valuable if folklore studies were counted among them as such a reconfiguration continues to be contemplated.

In this reflection, I proceed in three stages. In the first, I introduce world-systems analysis from a folkloristic perspective. In the second, I evoke the relationship of the human sciences to the rise of the capitalist world-system, as described in Wallerstein's work as a world-systems analyst. This will allow me to situate folklore studies and European ethnology into this historical picture. In a final section, I touch on Wallerstein's case for the reorganization of the social sciences, situating these proposals vis-à-vis folklore studies and ethnology (in its European ethnological form, if not also in its American cultural anthropological one). Through these stages of discussion, my hope is to provide a stepping stone that folklorists can use for further exploration of these issues and themes. As reflected in the first epigraph, I share Fine's view that folklore studies would be well-served by giving greater attention to the place of its objects of inquiry in their world-system contexts.<sup>3</sup> The position of folklore studies among the disciplines should also remain a key concern for our field, regardless of the stances that we might occupy. As evoked by the second epigraph, one of the few solutions available to folklore studies to avoid being forgotten and thereby neglected by its scholarly neighbors is to reach out in their direction, something that I also attempt here.

## WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS: GENERAL FEATURES

I am not a world-systems analyst although, as should be evident here, I am sympathetic to what the approach can offer. I feel that folklorists should know more about the perspective, even if they choose not to embrace it, incorporate it, or debate it. As an interested outsider to the perspective, there are limits to my ability to be a reliable guide. Thankfully, my task here does not require an elaborate account, as sophisticated-but-accessible introductions to the approach are widely available, as are varied critiques of it. A broad community of scholars working in world-systems analysis exist and they, as one might expect of work within any research framework, do not all agree on all questions. There are also scholars who share concerns with those who embrace this approach, but who do not themselves identify with it. Some of these remain in active dialogue with the approach's advocates, while others work in parallel. Plenty of scholars in the social sciences share with American folklorists a generalized low-level indifference to the perspective – not giving it a whole lot of thought.

In this complexity, it is an oversimplification to use the work of a single scholar to represent a whole collective endeavor. It is a further oversimplification to reply primarily on a single work by a single individual. Recognizing this problem, I propose to go ahead and trade in such a simplification of a simplification. My justifications are as follows. The key work to which I direct readers, and on which I will rely most fully here, is a sophisticated, later-career introduction to world-systems analysis by the scholar, Wallerstein, who pioneered the approach and is its most well-recognized advocate. This short, book-length introduction draws on more than three decades of work in this

field and was written with readers like you and me in mind (Wallerstein 2004: xi–xii). That is, the book – *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* – presumes an interest in history and the social sciences but it does not demand knowledge of its specific topic. Published in 2004, the book has garnered many positive reviews, is widely taught, and has accrued nearly 5,800 citations in the scholarly literature.<sup>4</sup> For my purpose of putting folklore studies into dialogue with world-systems analysis, the volume has many merits beyond its scale, scope, prominence, and the centrality of its author to the perspective. It also includes synthetic discussions of the key matters that I propose to specifically examine here. Readers who wish to go beyond my reflection can find additional sources discussed in the close of the book and, of course, can readily find a much larger and more polyphonic literature on these issues. In addition to this volume (Wallerstein 2004) readers will likely benefit from, and I will draw on, the biographical essay that appears in *The Essential Wallerstein* (2000).<sup>5</sup>

I will not dwell on Wallerstein's professional biography, but it may help to evoke something of the mood of his work. As many folklorists have brought lived social and political concerns to their own work and have seen their lives and their engagements with the social world in terms of both scholarship about, and action within, the world, some affinity might be established with words with which Wallerstein begins his autobiographical account:

My intellectual biography is one long quest for an adequate explanation of contemporary reality that I and others might act upon. The quest is both intellectual and political – I have always felt it could not be one without being at the same time the other – for myself or for anyone. (Wallerstein 2000: xv)

As a graduate student in sociology at Columbia University, he began with a master's degree project on McCarthyism in American (U.S.) political life, followed by many years of work (in, and beyond his doctorate) on the sociological study of Africa in colonial and decolonizing contexts. I do not review this history of work specifically on Africa, but it would likely be of interest to many folklorists and ethnologists. As he describes his concerns retrospectively, he felt that while others centered their concerns in world affairs on the Cold War, the big story, in his estimation, was "the struggle to overcome the control by the western world of the rest of the world" (Wallerstein 2004: xvii).

For my purposes here, the key development in Wallerstein's work from its substantive African studies phase to world-systems analysis was a realization that he describes as having two key elements. One aspect of this shift has to do with the unit of analysis in social research. For folklorists, I note that this is the issue that Dorothy Noyes (1995; 2012; 2016) has explored most influentially in her series of conceptual pieces related to "The Social Base of Folklore" (2012). Building particularly on the work of Richard Bauman (1971), Noyes directed our attention to, and clarified, the different ways that folklorists have thought about the social ground on which the everyday practices and expressive forms of special interest to the field are enacted. Writing in her paper "Group," from the perspective of folkloristics in the United States and Canada, Noyes (1995: 449) noted the ways that folklorists have moved progressively further towards the micro- and away from the macroscale. As she artfully notes throughout these studies, this has to do with a lot of influences and some anxieties that we carry into, and that we carry forward in, our work. Especially since the corruption of our field in Germany before and during the

Second World War, U.S., Canadian, and western European folklorists have often been leery of the nation and of nationalisms, a social location and an ideology that our field often served since its European birth (Abrahams 1993; Bronner 2006; Bendix 2012: 365, 371). This is a matter to which I will return, but here it is worth noting that folklorists in these regions moved away from the national as a preferred unit of analysis concurrent with a parallel move away from it in the work of Wallerstein and the world-systems analysts who followed his lead. But the shift for North American and some western European folklorists was towards the interaction order, whereas for the world-systems analysts the shift was to a larger, rather than smaller, preferred unit of analysis.<sup>6</sup>

This larger unit of analysis is called a world-system. I want to keep bringing my evocation back to folklore studies. So even before providing Wallerstein's definition of world-system, I would stress that some folklorists already do work in which the modern world-system (whether called such or not) is the "social base" at issue. While we could consider any expressive form or vernacular cultural practice that is in global circulation as a means of seeing this (yoga, for instance, or the drinking of tea), it is most particularly obvious in situations, such as in the study of global heritage policy, wherein we know that we are studying cultural norms and forms whose primary social location, whose home, so to speak, is marked as "global." This is apparent in a rich body of work from many scholars, but those who have done ethnographic work on cultural heritage and cultural property *within* the bodies of international governance, such as Valdimar Hafstein (UNESCO) and Stefan Groth (WIPO), offer a particularly obvious and instructive instance (Groth 2012; Hafstein 2018). In world-systems analysis terms, their work is about the ways that "folklore" becomes not just an object in, but an instrument of, governance in the "interstate system" that loosely binds nations into the contemporary global social order, that is, into the present world-system. While world-systems analysts have not, to my knowledge, engaged with the global assemblage that is contemporary heritage policy, it might be seen, in Wallerstein's (2004: 93) terms, as part of what he terms geoculture, that is, "norms and modes of discourse that are widely accepted as legitimate within the world-system."

Wallerstein (*ibid.*: 17) notes that: "in 'world-systems' we are dealing with a spatial/temporal zone which cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules." In a glossary to *World-Systems Analysis* he further observes:

A world-system is not the system of the world, but a system *that is* a world and which can be, most often has been, located in an area less than the entire globe. World-systems analysis argues that the unities of social reality within which we operate, whose rules constrain us, are for the most part such world-systems (other than the now-extinct, small minisystems that once existed on the earth). World-systems analysis argues that there have been thus far only two varieties of world-systems: world-economies and world empires. A world-empire (such as the Roman Empire, Han China) is a large bureaucratic structure with a single political center and an axial division of labor, but multiple cultures. A world-economy is a large axial division of labor with multiple political centers and multiple cultures. In English, the hyphen is essential to indicate these concepts. "World system" without a hyphen suggests that there has been only one world-system in the history of the world. (*Ibid.*: 99)



In this context, world-systems are a unit of analysis for historical and social research as well as a social aggregation in which I and other people live, with the Roman empire (a world-empire) or the modern capitalist world system (a system predicated on the capitalist world-economy) serving as instances. My friends among the Yuchi (Euchee) people of modern Oklahoma, USA and the Baiku Yao people of Guangxi, China live in different and varied social structures, social networks, and social frames of reference, operating at a range of scales, but they also share with each other, and with everyone else living today, an encompassing social reality. That common reality has many dimensions, is constantly changing, is experienced differently, and arose under specific historical and social conditions over a long period of time. World-systems analysis prioritizes its study.

More could be said about the world-system as a unit of analysis, but the other shift in Wallerstein's thinking, which I evoked above, needs to be raised. Alongside a shift of unit of analysis was a shift in methodological understanding. A social science focused on nation-states as the bounded containers for societies was an unhelpful inheritance in Wallerstein's view (cf. Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). So too were established attitudes about research methods. Viewing the social sciences in historical perspective, Wallerstein has characterized the division between ideographic (humanistic, interpretive, historical) methods and nomothetic (scientific, generalizing, law-seeking) ones as counterproductive. The division was the result of a series of debates and disagreements, such as the *Methodenstreit* ("methods dispute") in later 19th century German social science, that became routinized, producing both splits into new disciplines and, as in American anthropology during the years of own graduate training (the 1990s), seemingly unending-but-fruitless debates within them. Describing his own mature view, Wallerstein (2000: xvii) argues that the social sciences were founded on a false methodological distinction and that, to prosper, "all [social] analysis, if it were to grapple seriously with the description and explanation of the real world, had to be simultaneously historic and systemic."

While Wallerstein and other world-system analysts do very different work from most folklorists and ethnologists, such scholars can certainly take comfort in Wallerstein's view, which sees ideographic work (i.e. social research concerned with what is unique [that is, historically particular] about a given human situation) as a legitimate and integral part of the larger enterprise to which he and his colleagues also contribute. This theme will return in the later sections of this study, but for now the key point is that Wallerstein sees social research as a unified endeavor (the "historical social sciences") advanced with both interpretive or historical methods and scientific or generalizing ones. In terms of our own disciplinary history, Wallerstein is revisiting the issues raised prominently by Franz Boas (1887) in his key early paper "The Study of Geography." In that account, Boas argued for the importance of cosmographic research attending to particulars of the social and natural world alongside, and of course informing, work that develops general systematic understandings.

These two elements – the world-system as unit analysis and an integrative approach to methods that includes historical specifics – are a suitable starting point for my discussion. The range of results of research in world-systems analysis is beyond the scope of this work, but some key and widely discussed insights can be raised. It is always awkward to summarize a vast body of complex research in a brief scope. In this case, the

matter is made more complex because of the scale of the themes and their deep history and complex and changing present nature.

Perhaps most well-known among Wallerstein's contributions is his characterization of the modern world-economy as being "marked by an axial division of labor between core-like production processes and peripheral production processes, which resulted in unequal exchange favoring those involved in core-like production processes" (Wallerstein 2004: 17). Wallerstein here is choosing his words of explanation very carefully. He continues:

Since such processes tend to group together in particular countries, one could use a shorthand language by talking of core and peripheral zones (or even core or peripheral states), as long as one remembered that it was the production processes and not the states that were core-like and peripheral (ibid.).

To the extent that some folklorists have heard of, or used, this distinction, it seems to manifest most commonly in the simplified form wherein a particular nation-state is characterized as "belonging" to the group of core, semiperipheral, and peripheral states (or "being" such a state). At issue here though are kinds of economic activities and their differential effect on different kinds of individuals and groups sharing the larger system. This is most easily seen when we compare nations or regions dominated by raw material extraction and those involved in industrial manufacture or post-industrial "service economies."

This thread in world-systems analysis grows out of earlier work by Latin American political economists and what came to be known as dependency theory. Much work in world-systems analysis accounts for the origin and nature of the unequal economic (and political) relationships that follow from core-periphery patterns. These patterns are dynamic over the run of history. By way of example, in both economic and geopolitical terms, once powerful imperial nations such as Spain have, in world-systems terms, fallen into semi-peripheral patterns and structures, exercising influence on some weaker peripheral nations (former colonies, for instance) but also being influenced by more powerful core nations (and the economic actors based in them), such as the United States.

Often closely allied with specific individuals living culturally rich, if often economically difficult, lives in diverse circumstances around the world, folklorists are often apprehensive about making broad characterizations like "X is a peripheral nation" (although, as Wallerstein notes in the quotation above, this is a risky shorthand). But, most folklorists have also indirectly absorbed some of the basic insights of the world-systems understanding of the capitalist world-system, including of the interstate system, the global division of labor characterizing the contemporary world, and such features as the dependencies that "developing" nations experience in their relationships with more powerful nations (often former colonial powers) and the corporations based within them. (For a fuller treatment of the modern and contemporary economic order in world-systems terms, see Wallerstein 2004: chapter 2.)

## WORLD-SYSTEMS ANALYSIS: ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLES FOR FOLKLORISTS AND ETHNOLOGISTS

I have not provided an adequate sketch of Wallerstein's basic account of the contemporary world-system or even the axial division of labor that is one of its key features. For folklorists wondering if it offers much of direct relevance to their work beyond providing an account of the largest background level to more local and particular investigations, I highlight the following sample features as points of possible connection and interest. I cite four examples – households, semi-proletarian status, national identity, and colonization – but others could be developed with folkloristic interests in mind. These special interests do not, of course, cover the fullness of world-systems analysis, which also includes many concerns (such as long-term cycles of expansion and contraction in the world economy) to which folklorists have given little or no thought.

Wallerstein (2004: 33) views households (sometimes also recognized as families, sometimes not; sometimes cohabitating, sometimes not) as key social units. Much fruitful ethnographic work by folklorists and ethnologists shares this view, thus attending to the world-systems view of households is a potential point of entry. For Wallerstein, households pool resources and pursue a mix of productive activities. These go far beyond wage income (which is itself very diverse) and include subsistence activities, petty commodity production, rent, and transfer payments (ibid.: 32–35). Viewed from the perspective of the kinds of ethnographic encounters that fieldwork-oriented folklorists and ethnologists have, this is an important list and world-systems analysts are smart in how they frame these categories. Subsistence activity can include growing or gathering food for one's household or building one's own home from gathered materials – and we have long studied such practices – but it also includes such things as washing dishes or putting together flat-packed DIY furniture (ibid.: 33). These later activities are just the sort of thing that many European ethnologists study today, even if American folkloristics remains focused on more obviously expressive practices (for example, Ehn and Löfgren 2010; Jespersen and Damsholt 2014; SIEF 2022). Similarly, petty commodity production includes such things as household basket production for local or regional markets or the production of tourist crafts, but also activities such as street vending or freelance work (Wallerstein 2004: 33). For Wallerstein, households are also prominent as key points of articulation with (socioeconomic) class and with identities and status-group memberships (Wallerstein 2004: 36–38). These modes of social differentiation, and their inculcation, are part of the bread and butter of much contemporary work in folklore studies.

Households are, of course, hardly the sole concern of world-systems analysts. They are a major focus in social and cultural anthropology, particularly economic anthropology and kinship studies, as well as in many kinds of sociology. Folklorists have contributed in important ways to the study of households also, particularly through attention to how people live inside vernacular buildings and how households are a locus for the intergenerational transfer of cultural knowledge and artistic repertoires. Those two streams intersect literally when we consider how households entertain themselves inside houses. Consider our field's founding interest in what the Brothers Grimm called *Hausmärchen* ('household tales') (Grimm and Grimm 1857 [1812–1814]). I honor these other streams of work and I evoke Wallerstein's approach to households



just as one point of connection for folklorists who share an interest in this node of social life (Wallerstein 2004: 32–38).

Close consideration of the status of households worldwide leads to a number of related topics, one of which can provide another example of common interests between folklore studies and world-systems analysis. On the folklore studies side, consider as an example the work that folklorist Mary Hufford conducted in a coal mining region of West Virginia, in the United States (Hufford n.d.). This body of research, public-facing interpretation, and policy activism is rich in many areas of local community, as well as scholarly, concern. One aspect of it concerns the ways that individuals and their households endeavor to supplement wage labor with additional productive activities. Examples from Hufford's documentary work (with diverse collaborators) include harvesting ginseng for sale in global markets (Hufford 1997; 2002; 2003), gathering mushrooms and ramps (a kind of wild leek) for household and community-wide consumption (Hufford 2005; 2006), and gardening (and preserving of) vegetables also for household use (Hufford n.d.). The environmental degradation wrought by mountain top removal coal mining looms large in Hufford's work, as does local environmental activism aimed at protecting local environments and preserving them as *de facto* commons that local people can continue to rely on (Hufford 2002; 2005; Hufford et al. 2011). I only skim the surface of the work of Hufford and her collaborators here. I commend it to you.

I raise the example of Hufford's work here because it so comprehensively articulates with a wide range of issues central to world-systems analysis as explicated by Wallerstein (2004). Whether or not the label fits Hufford's interlocutors accurately or exactly, Wallerstein's account of semiproletarian households is an instructive instance. As a heuristic, he posits that a proletarian household is one where 50% or more of lifetime household income comes from wage work and a semiproletarian household as one where total lifetime household income from wages is less than 50%. For our purposes here, these calculations can be approximate. The key issue is that "an employer has an advantage in employing those wage-laborers who are in a semiproletarian household" (ibid.: 35). In situations in which households pursue the kinds of subsistence activities and petty commodity production activities that Hufford describes so movingly for West Virginia's coal country (a setting where there are also transfer payments [especially forms of government aid] and some rents), employers are able to pay employees less than the absolute minimum wage that would, if it were the only source of household income, insure household survival. Put more simply, non-wage household income, from gardening or gathering and other ways of "making do," represents a kind of subsidy to employers. Wallerstein has much of interest to say about these kinds of situations, which also loom large in the work of American folklorists, whether they work in rural areas overseas or throughout the U.S. In the two regions that have figured in my own ethnographic work (rural and suburban Oklahoma, USA and rural Guangxi, China), they are profoundly present, even if my own scholarship has not yet stressed them.<sup>7</sup>

Folklore studies has long been entwined with nationalism. This is a larger issue for both our field and world-systems analysts, but in his survey, Wallerstein highlights three prominent ways that nationalism has historically been promoted – schools, military service, and civic ceremonies. Our field – in the U.S. at least – has long attended to the later, especially through the study of cultural performance events, including civic

holidays, but as manifest, for instance, in the massive Veterans History Project (U.S. Library of Congress) and other military-oriented folklore projects, the second of these also figures in our work in important ways. A long stream of work in children's folklore and a robust focus in public folklore concerned with folklore and education can also be cited in this context. More broadly, the cultural expressions and social construction of nationalism and nationalist identity is a core concern of both folklore studies and world-systems analysis, a matter that will return in a different guise in the next section (Wallerstein 2004: 54; Bronner 2006).

Colonization can provide a final illustrative point of contact. While the incorporation of peasantries into states in programs of nationalism is the big story behind much folklore studies history, the encompassment of indigenous populations into colonial empires and settler states is of comparable importance, even if one treats, as I am here, folklore studies and European ethnology (*Volkskunde*, etc.) as a distinct disciplinary formation from cultural anthropology (American ethnology), British social anthropology (and its antecedents), German *Volkerkunde* and their closely related disciplinary manifestations. As with nation-building and nationalism, folklore studies was profoundly shaped by its emergence during, and entanglements with, colonization and colonialism (Naithani 2008; Briggs and Naithani 2012; Ó Giolláin 2017). While they have only begun to account for the fuller colonial contexts of their work, folklorists have made important contributions to understanding not only the field's colonial history, but also to understanding the colonial project and its consequences more broadly. The work of Sadhana Naithani (1997; 2001; 2002; 2008; 2010) provides an important example. In both a specifically Indian and a broad global context, Naithani has charted the scope of the relationships twining folklore studies and colonialism together, pointing as well to changes and possibilities in the present and future. Like Wallerstein, her work shows how disciplinary activity has both been shaped by, and helped shape and reshape, the larger global transformations and contexts in which it is situated. It is also noteworthy that Naithani has argued eloquently that the study of folklore in bounded national contexts has impeded its comparative study, including its study at a global scale, as with her work on folklore and folkloristics in the British empire (Naithani 2010: 1–10).<sup>8</sup> The study of folklore history in its colonial (and nationalist) contexts is one area where, despite a widespread disciplinary turn to the micro-scale and away from historical inquiry, the link to the concerns of world-systems scholars is more immediate and evident.

I have not characterized Wallerstein's approach to understanding colonies, colonization, and decolonization. Going back to his early work on Africa and the postcolonial circumstances of African nations, this has been a significant theme in his work. Colonies and post-colonial regions and states are also fundamental to the history and present of the capitalist world-system and thus feature prominently in Wallerstein's detailed accounts of it (for example, Wallerstein 2011a [1974]; 2011b [1980]; 2011c [1989]; 2011d). As noted above, decolonization was what he saw as the crucial transformation in the modern world-system in his own lifetime. Of all that might be said, in a folkloristic context it might be useful to simply note that, from a world-systems analysis perspective, it is through the process of European colonization that those peoples who had long carried on lives outside of any world-system were brought into the changing global order that now (for the present at least) encompasses all of us. As the long duration history of the Yuchi people with whom I have collaborated reveals, this does not mean that indig-

enous peoples once outside the capitalist world-system were not part of complex social networks. We know that their “pre-Columbian” social world was dizzyingly complex, it just was not a world-system in Wallerstein’s sense, even if it was a comprehensive “system of the world” in Marshal Sahlins’ sense (Sahlins 1993: 11; 1999: v; Wallerstein 2004: 55–56; Waselkov 2004; Jackson 2012; Worth 2012).

Identities, and the concept of identity, social movements (together with national movements constituting “antisystemic movements”), sovereignty, the nature of tradition, and many other issues of shared interest between folklorists and Wallerstein and other world-systems analysts could be flagged. My hope is that I have adequately suggested the value of further exploring such intersections. Having evoked some shared interests, I turn now to the place of folklore studies and European ethnology in the birth of the social sciences.

## FOLKLORE STUDIES AND EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN THE BIRTH OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

While world-systems analysis is best understood in its own terms through engagement with specific research drawing upon the approach, through programmatic and introductory works by key practitioners, and through wider debates in and about the approach, one specific gap in world-systems analysis warrants specific engagement by folklorists, even if folklorists as a group do not engage the approach in a general way. As suggested above, Wallerstein’s account of the current capitalist world-system is a historical one. Much work in this field focuses, for instance, on the initial rise of capitalism in Europe and, as has been suggested already, its continuing transformations up to the present. In the four volumes on *The Modern World-System* published to date, Wallerstein himself has tracked this history from the 16th century into the early 20th (2011a [1974]; 2011b [1980]; 2011c [1989]; 2011d). While these questions have occupied a wide range of scholars, Wallerstein is distinctive, in my view, in his concurrent concern for the rise and role of the social sciences in the context of this larger history. While noteworthy, this interest is not totally unique, of course, and it is reflected in some core works by folklorists. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs’ *Voices of Modernity: Language Ideologies and the Politics of Inequality* (2003) is a significant example that can link folklore studies into my discussion. But Wallerstein’s take is distinctive.

A deeper summary of Wallerstein’s views would require exploring the impacts that he attributes to the French Revolution and its role in fostering centrist liberalism (in relation to conservatism and radicalism) in the capitalist world-system (2011d: xvi). In his introductory history of the academic disciplines, he tracks the rise of the modern university and its faculties, placing special emphasis on the fragmentation of philosophy into the modern disciplines that we now possess (2004: 1–22). An early split into the humanities and the sciences proved to have both general and specific significance. (For Wallerstein it also fostered specific problems.) For the emergent social sciences, a specific effect was to see the emergent disciplines gravitate to one side or the other of the ideographic/nomothetic (humanities/science) divide. But this is not the only way that these fields sorted themselves out. The social worlds that they took account of were also divided up along a different axis – the west/rest one. Finally, there was a topical

parsing that was born out of an ideological proposition of that time and place. Referring to economics, political science, and sociology (studying the Western European present) versus the Western European past studied by history, Wallerstein asks: "Why, however would there be *three* disciplines to study the present but only one to study the past?" He answers: "Because the dominant liberal ideology of the nineteenth century insisted that *modernity* was defined by the differentiation of three special spheres: the market, the state, and the civil society" (Wallerstein 2004: 6).

Wallerstein provides a rich and nuanced account of the factors that shaped the differentiation of the social science disciplines and their relative alignments with these and other distinctions. History (as a scholarly discipline) was ideographic in orientation, but it shared with the nomothetic social sciences (economics, political science, sociology) a primary (initial, early) concern with the study of the same European societies in which these scholars lived and work. Sharing with history a more holistic view of social life and an ideographic interest in particulars were two other fields: Oriental studies (concerned with non-western peoples with writing, imperial histories, and world religions) and anthropology (by which Wallerstein specifically means ethnographically-based work pursued in this early period among colonized, non-western peoples falling outside the purview of the Orientalists) (ibid.: 4–9). Readers of my summary of his summary history will be left wondering about omissions. I recommend consulting his account directly for more nuance. My purpose is just to set up a system in which folklore studies and (European) ethnology are absent.<sup>9</sup>

Wallerstein tracks the ways that these fields have changed since their formation as modern disciplines in the late 19th century, focusing in particular on developments after World War II and then in the wake of 1968. Decolonization, the rise of the concept of "development", and the Cold War-era emergence of area studies fields figure into this story of change. The key point though for this part of my account is that all of these disciplines arose in a broader European (and North American) context of the rise of centrist liberalism and its alternatives (radicalism, conservatism) and a host of transformations in governance, economics, and cultural life within the world-system. In particular, they arose alongside the formation of modern European (and North American) nation-states of the sort that we now inhabit. They were shaped by, and themselves shaped, both European social transformations and the global transformation in which Europe and European settler societies figured so prominently. In Wallerstein's view, the social sciences were and are an important part of the "knowledge structures" of the capitalist world-system (Wallerstein 2004: xi, 1–16).<sup>10</sup>

A key aspect of Wallerstein's account of the disciplines is what happens in the 20th century with the rise of area studies and the world changes that it responded to and shaped. There are many facets of this, but one that he stresses is the ways not only that all of the disciplines became more muddled and destabilized (and international), but that Oriental studies and (cultural) anthropology faced particular challenges as the social worlds that they addressed mutated. Regarding this, he writes:

So it [this shift] challenges the logic of the disciplines. Oriental studies give up its name, the scholars join other divisions, they become historians or professors of religion. The cultural anthropologists tried various things. They decided that Europeans and North Americans have tribes too; they would study Swiss mountaineers

and people in Chicago slums, and now they decide they'll study, "culture." They are in search of a *raison d'être*. (Wallerstein 1996: 4; see also 2004: 11.)

I do not contest the very macro-history that Wallerstein recounts in his treatment of the social science disciplines, but like all such accounts, details can matter and prompt reassessment. Most cultural anthropologists would contest the simplicity of this account. At the very least, details usually matter to those who feel a sense of connection to the specifics. The quotation just given comes from one of Wallerstein's earlier programmatic statements on the refashioning of the social sciences. To arrive at our destination, consider "Swiss mountaineers" as a focus for anthropological research. I suspect that the image that Wallerstein had in mind were contemporary bourgeois outdoors enthusiasts with resources for travel and contemporary equipment.

For me, though, the image is fortuitous, because it could also be taken to refer to people living and working in the mountains of Switzerland. As Regina Bendix (2012) carefully recounts for those unaware of the history of Swiss folklore studies and ethnology (= *Volkerkunde* → *Vielnamenfach*), the ethnography of Swiss mountaineers in this sense is a longstanding area of research. In keeping with Wallerstein's larger agenda, the formation of the social sciences included an ideographically-inclined, ethnographically (and historically)-based, holistically-oriented, culture-minded field operative in, to use world-systems terms, those European states characterized by core-like economic production and relative strength in the interstate system. Whereas the anthropology that he has in mind (early forms of North American cultural anthropology, the social anthropology of the British Empire, and of the *Volkerkunde* of German-speaking and German-influenced areas), the cognate but distinct (national, regional) forms of ethnology and folklore studies found elsewhere in Europe (and North America) are not present in his account, even in the book-length treatment, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Wallerstein et al. 1996), that I will discuss more in the next section.<sup>11</sup>

Briggs and Naithani stress that folklore studies (folkloristics) has been profoundly shaped (as a whole, and on an international basis) by the history and practices of colonialism (what they call the "coloniality of folklore"). They are at pains to demonstrate and explore this point because the dominant histories of the discipline have emphasized its entanglements with the rise of Enlightenment rationalism in northern Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries and with romantic nationalism in the late 18th and 19th centuries. I stress Briggs and Naithani's point because it too is relevant for engagements with (and by) world-systems analysis, but also because to compensate for the gap in the world-system's treatment of the disciplines, I have to revisit the standard narrative of folklore studies history and, in this specialized context, stress what folklorists largely understand, which is the nationalist genealogy in the history of the field.

For any world-systems analyst who might read these reflections, my task is to stress that there is, basically, a discipline missing from the Wallerstein history of the social sciences. It is not a minor gap either. I do not say this out of chauvinism but because the interpretive concerns of world-systems analysis are so (understandably) concerned with the development of processes and ideas (of global importance) in northern Europe (and North America). Folklore studies and European ethnology are not giant world disciplines, as sociology and economics are, and thus it is understandable how their dis-



ciplinary histories might be swept into a larger narrative focused on *Volkerkunde*/social anthropology/cultural anthropology/non-European ethnology and its colonial engagements.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, study of the rise of European nation states has continually emphasized the outsized influence that folklore studies had in these processes. I am not summarizing this work here, but we have extensive literatures on the histories and contexts of nation-making and folklore's disciplinary development for Ireland, Estonia, Greece, Germany, Finland, Sweden and other parts of Europe.<sup>13</sup> One cannot visit a northern European nation such as Estonia without seeing the historical fingerprints of folklorists and European ethnologists everywhere. In such nations, the ethnography and regional ethnology of the citizenry (particularly the former peasantry) looms large in the polity, in the economy, and in civil society. Scholarship in overseas anthropology (*Volkerkunde*, etc.) in such nations has historically been weak if present at all, whereas folklore studies and (regional, European) ethnology (*Volkskunde*, etc.) have been, over the long haul of disciplinary existence, strong. North America (specifically the U.S. and Canada as settler colonies) is unique because both forms of scholarship could thrive and hybridize. In ways that accord with Wallerstein's arguments about 20th century transformations, still ongoing, these disciplines continue to transform and reorganize in all of these North Atlantic settings. Folklore studies is also now an international discipline, with areas of strength and distinctive practices manifest throughout the world(-system), from Latin America to East Asia (Bendix and Hasan-Rokem 2012).

#### FOLKLORE STUDIES AND EUROPEAN ETHNOLOGY IN THE REORGANIZATION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

While calls for interdisciplinarity are ubiquitous in the scholarly spaces that folklorists and European ethnologists inhabit, Wallerstein has argued prominently for a different reconfiguration of the social sciences, one that he characterizes as unidisciplinary.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of his view that the 19th century division of the social sciences into narrow disciplines atomized what should have been a more holistic endeavor – worldwide in scope, concerned with the full breadth of human activity, and both historical and systematic, ideographic and nomenothetic in orientation – Wallerstein has argued for a reconfiguration of the social sciences. The name that he and his collaborators use for this unitary undertaking is “historical social science.”

I will return to the case for a reunified historical social science below, but are political science, sociology, economics, history, geography, anthropology and others that might be named about to disappear on the basis of wide agreement with Wallerstein's proposals? I do not think so and I do not raise them because I am eager for folklore studies and ethnology to be recognized fully as a part of this group just in time to join in the abandonment of disciplinary identities. As with my larger reflection, my goal is more basic – to suggest that folklorists and European ethnologists would be well served by engaging with and contemplating the issues that Wallerstein and his colleagues have raised.

As I contemplate such proposals myself, I am mindful that folklorists in the U.S. and in Europe also have some experience of their own with efforts of renaming and reorienting disciplines. In the U.S. case, proposals (in the 1990s) to decommission the name

“folklore” as a disciplinary label (as in folklore studies or folkloristics) were not realized, although the debate in retrospect was probably therapeutic. The reasons why these proposals were not acted upon is too large a topic for this context, but factors relevant to Wallerstein’s more ambitious proposals include sunk institutional costs, attachment to distinctive intellectual histories, methods, genealogies, and identities, and the nature of collective action problems in general. Individuals, in the U.S. context, could choose to find their own personal paths away from the identity “folklorist” but, absent an overwhelming consensus to change and the risks associated with putting oneself and one’s colleagues out of business, folklore studies in the U.S. continued onward beyond what, for a moment, seemed like a point of existential crisis (Bendix 1998; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998; Oring 1998).<sup>15</sup> Its existence as an enterprise historically related to, but by the 1990s largely autonomous from (American) anthropology (and from literature studies), played a role that has not yet been explored. The rise and (relative) decline of cultural studies in the English-speaking world is another factor in need of consideration.

The situation in Germany presents a marked contrast. Folklore studies role during the Nazi-era created a situation ripe for collective transformation. The result was significant reflexive consideration of disciplinary pasts and futures and the transformation that Bendix describes as the move “From *Volkskunde* to the ‘Field of Many Names’.” While the need to make a break with the past became clear, the choice of what to name the new enterprise was vexing and, ultimately, plural, as Bendix (2012) has chronicled. These are only relatively recent instances of disciplinary renaming and reorganization projects and many others could be cited, including William Thoms’ (1996) coining of the name “folk-lore” itself in 1846.

The history of the social sciences, the consequences of this historical ordering and contemporary practice, and proposals for reorganizing them appear in a number of works by Wallerstein and his collaborators. Most prominent is *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences* (Wallerstein et al. 1996). The book represents the work of group of scholars in and beyond the social sciences whose task was to “reflect on the present social sciences and their future” (Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation 1996: x).<sup>16</sup> In a presentation-turned-article for the Social Science Research Council’s newsletter *Items*, Wallerstein (1996) offered a short account of the Commission’s work and its findings. In the 2002 Sydney Mintz lecture, Wallerstein offered a treatment of these issues specifically keyed for an anthropological audience. While that occasion might have prompted a more granular exploration inclusive of European ethnology, if not folkloristics, it presents the core argument in more detail vis-à-vis American-style (overseas) anthropology, without attention to either Americanist anthropology in the mode of Boasian ethnology and folklore studies or European folkloristics/ethnology (Wallerstein 2003). In the context of its general overview of Wallerstein’s (ibid.: chapter 1) views, he also raises the disciplinary questions in *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction*. Wallerstein shares his thoughts on the work of the Commission and elaborates on the issues further in a long interview with Carlos Antonio Aguirre Rojas (2012). These discussions were preceded by a collection of essays that examined various “Limits of Nineteenth-Century Paradigms” in the social sciences (Wallerstein 1991). Wallerstein’s colleague Richard Lee (2014) considers these issues from an allied perspective, adding in concern for the state of the humanities. The historical factors shaping the social sciences are treated in detail in these works and I

evoked some of them briefly in the previous section. Here I try to highlight some of the proposals made by Wallerstein and by the Gulbenkian Commission in its report (1996).

The history presented by Wallerstein in his various writings and by the Gulbenkian Commission that he chaired is powerful (although, as I have suggested, partial at least with respect to folklore studies and European ethnology). The problems that the structures of knowledge in the social sciences have generated or exacerbated demand the attention that they have been given in this body of work. The final chapter of "Open the Social Sciences" is smart and also realistic in its awareness of what has made the disciplines durable even as they have faltered in changing contexts.

What a reader of the report, especially with the distance provided by more than 20 years since its publication, is likely to think about the recommendations themselves, with which the report closes, are that they are relatively tame in relation to the contexts that provoked them. I attribute this to two factors in particular. One is just the passage of time and the unfolding of the trends that the authors identify and discuss. If the present shares features with the future the commissioners were seeking to reach, some of that can also be attributable to their efforts. They were read and reflected upon by practitioners in the social sciences, even if folklorists did not attend much to their recommendations (which, it is worth noting, happened in the same moment as cognate reassessments in North American folklore studies). But there is also the context of consensus building attendant to any committee report.

This aspect arises in Wallerstein's interview with Rojas (2012). Asked about "Open the Social Sciences" in relationship to Wallerstein's own aspirations for historical social science, Wallerstein cites the collective nature of that work and the agreements established among the participants about how the work would be pursued. Faced with the choice of developing, weighing, and debating all of the detailed pathways forward that might be constructed, they chose instead to "draw attention to the fundamental problems, inducing and even forcing people to reflect on them (Rojas 2012: 93)." He continues, "We didn't want them to discuss a proposed solution but rather to think around a problem, so that each of them might try to look for and elaborate a solution themselves" (*ibid.*).

Wallerstein notes in this context that, having made this choice – an emphasis on the context and on provoking wider discussion, shaped a different but related dynamic. He observes that the Commission, in that context, could have been read as identifying a problem but not showing good faith in proposing solutions. This is a reading of such situations that often leads to their dismissal as "not worthwhile" by skeptical colleagues. In response to the conjuncture of the committee dynamic, the desire to promote discussion, and the need to make some suggestions both useful and agreeable to the commissioners, they pursued a "compromise solution," deciding "that it would be best to develop only a few of these small suggestions." Wallerstein personally saw these as "a sort of first step on the path of these possible solutions to our dilemmas (*ibid.*: 93)." Before returning to Wallerstein's own view, what were these small suggestions and what do they look like now, particularly for folklore studies?

Wallerstein clearly wishes that readers of "Open the Social Sciences" (1996) would not (as some clearly have done) skip to the last two pages of the book for purposes of judging the simple "first step" suggestions out of context and I do not wish to encourage such readings myself (Rojas 2012: 93). That said, readers of this reflection will want

to gain some sense of them. In the Commission's first suggestion, they encourage, and provide rationale for encouraging, programs that bring together scholars "for a year's work" across disciplines for joint research on "specific urgent themes." This suggestion is closely related to the second on "the establishment of integrated research programs within university structures that cut across traditional lines, have specific intellectual objectives, and have funds for a limited period of time (say about five years)" (Wallerstein et al. 1996: 103–104). Bendix, Kilian Bizer, and Noyes (2017), from a multidisciplinary vantage point that is centered in folklore studies and European ethnology, have recently described such endeavors in ethnographic, conceptual, and practical terms. In the years since the publication of "Open the Social Sciences", such work has become common (if not universal) and, for those who work in research universities (a small percentage of active scholars, of course), we now not only confront the impact of such endeavors pursued at scale, but are assessing their costs and consequences, not just their advantages, especially when such activities as "grand challenges" research is given high prioritization by administrators and funding agencies. While not all folklorists have access to opportunities to participate in such work and while the rise of such work has sometimes marginalized those less inclined to join it, we now live in a world in which the commission's first and second recommendations are now very present.

The commission's third recommendation which, like others here, is university-centric, argues for the joint appointment of professors to multiple relevant departments. This practice, at least in American research universities like my own, is certainly (more) common in one sense now than it was before. The Commissioners argue for a strong form of joint appointment, one that goes beyond courtesy appointments to structure the faculty in such a way as to encourage active faculty participation in the work of their multiple home units. The strong form of this practice is perhaps expressed best in condensed form in the suggestion that "we would require that each department have at least 25 percent of its members who did *not* have a degree in that discipline." The commissioners embrace the hope that such an "administrative device" would increase the range of "intellectual debate within each department, the curricula offered, [and] the points of view that were considered plausible or legitimate" (Wallerstein et al. 1996: 104–105). Those university programs where folklore is researched and taught by more than one or two colleagues in relative isolation probably more closely approximated then (1996), and now still more approximates (2022) the goal set by the commissioners than is probably true in any other social science disciplines.

In its more forceful form, such a restructuring is a classic collective action problem, especially when leading research departments with strong disciplinary graduate programs see themselves as having a particular responsibility for the transmission of a disciplinary (as opposed to transdisciplinary) legacy. This disciplinary necessity is even more intensely felt in situations (as with folklore studies and museum ethnology in many locations) wherein such training also ensures continuity in the preservation and use of core national or regional archives or collections.<sup>17</sup> Be that as it may, the field of folklore studies has a longstanding history of (relative) disciplinary openness, both inbound (welcoming scholars not formally trained in the field into full participation) and outbound (folklore scholars finding academic homes in a range of departmental contexts, such as anthropology, English, comparative literature, media studies, history, art history, etc.).

The final “small suggestion” is another one that is probably already familiar to folklorists. The commissioners recommend “joint work for graduate students” by which they mean graduate curriculum that enable students to study outside their primary field. They are right in noting that this practice is not widespread in the social sciences (ca. 1996), but it is hardly uncommon among folklorists, now or when they were writing. Commenting that “only in a few departments in a few universities are students allowed to wander outside.” They argue:

We would turn this around too. Why not make it mandatory for students seeking a doctorate in a given discipline to take a certain number of courses, or do a certain amount of research, that is defined as being within the purview of a second department? (Wallerstein et al. 1996: 105)

The largest trainer of folklore doctoral students in the U.S., Indiana University has had this norm, as part of a larger campus structure, since long before the Gulbenkian Commission’s report. While not all have what at Indiana is called the “Ph.D. minor field,” the structure of most folklore graduate programs within a matrix of disciplinary, interdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary structures and coursework has insured that most folklore doctorates have, for decades, gotten the kind of training that the Commission proposed. The rise of the double PhD has further extended this characteristic and the longstanding fact that few folklorists come to graduate training with an undergraduate degree in folklore studies has also contributed to the cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary nature of the field. This holds true internationally, not solely in the United States.

As noted above, the Commissioners saw these four recommendations as modest ones. Their goal was to see to it that “the underlying issues be debated – clearly, openly, intelligently, and urgently” (Wallerstein et al. 1996: 105). I think that there is evidence to suggest that they enjoyed at least modest success. Whether they did or did not, there are indications that the world of practice in the social sciences has moved in the direction of their simpler, collective suggestions in the years since 1996. Even though folklorists themselves did not take up the Commission’s report at the time, the issues discussed in the full report remain important and current calls by graduate students, folklore studies faculty, and public-facing and applied folklorists to reassess and reorient folklore graduate training for the present and the future would be well-served, I think, if they could be articulated and explored in relationship to its assessments and arguments.<sup>18</sup>

As suggested by Wallerstein’s responses in his interview with Rojas (2012), he has his own personal response to these questions of restructuring. Given the firmness of his historical assessment and the clarity of his arguments about present needs, the softness of his own programmatic statements might come as a surprise. It might make sense to recognize that his historical work certainly caused him to recognize something of the hubris of earlier predictions and prescriptions for the future. Speaking a number of years after the work of the Commission, he notes: “I should say that I don’t have a clear view of how to orchestrate this reorganization of the social sciences either” (Rojas 2012: 93). He continues:

I think that this will be the fruit of a long discussion among all of us, and I can tell you that regarding this point, my position is similar to that which I maintain on the political level: just as I support a plural alternative for the left, so too would I



support the construction of a plural schema on the epistemological level for the reorganization of the social sciences (ibid.).

In this discussion, Wallerstein goes on to suggest that the best that we can do is to experiment ("explore different paths" – ibid.) and then carefully assess the results of those experiments. While this response is mild, the idea of unidisciplinary historical social science introduced above, represents Wallerstein taking a firmer personal stance, one that he can occupy as an individual even if he cannot compel the majority of his colleagues in the diverse social sciences to follow suit.

For folklorists, we might benefit not only from engaging with the discussions that I am evoking, but also by assessing our own experiments along these lines. For a time, it seemed like cultural heritage or cultural sustainability might, for instance, provide conceptual foci for the reorganization of the discipline in the U.S. I am doubtful of this, but what can we learn from those colleagues who embarked on experiments in reorienting in this way?<sup>19</sup> What can we learn not only from the reorganization of German *Volkskunde*, but from the broader reorganization of European ethnology of which it was (and is) an (ongoing) part? For a time, cultural studies as a branded post-disciplinary project seemed like a threat to both cultural anthropology and folkloristics, at least in the U.S. That no longer seems to be the case now. Similarly, semiotics once loomed large in (American) folklore studies, whereas today its lessons seem largely (re-)assimilated (back) into the field's canon. What might we learn from revisiting these ebbs and flows, including the rise (and sometimes fall) of neighboring disciplines (for example, semiotics), paradisciplines (for example, digital humanities), and interdisciplinary endeavors (for example, heritage studies)?

While the history and significance of the changing social sciences gets more attention than concrete recommendations in "Open the Social Sciences" and associated writings (as was intended), Wallerstein does have his own views as reflected in his discussions of world-systems analysis. I reiterate these in conclusion, using them as a means of rethinking folklore studies as a social science or, if you prefer, as a social science adjacent to the humanities field. For anyone considering the status of folklore studies as a field in itself and in relationship to its neighbors, I feel that attending to Wallerstein's history and assessment of present needs is a valuable resource.

## CONCLUSION

Along the way, I have sought to recruit colleagues in folklore studies and in ethnology to use Wallerstein and his colleagues' views on the world-system and its analysis, including on the nature of the disciplines within it, as a fresh (to them, at least) springboard for rethinking the present and future of work within these linked fields. I do not want to proscribe the uses to which this work might be put, but some implicit aspirations can be offered in conclusion.

One of these concerns the status of history and historical methods and goals in folklore and ethnology. While history remains crucial in some manifestations of these fields, the historical impulse that once was strong in U.S. folklore studies (including Americanist ethnology) and in European folklore studies and European (regional) ethnology have, in many settings atrophied. With the exception of disciplinary history

(which continues to be pursued in a robust way), historical work (in its myriad forms) has been in retreat for many generations. Important exceptions can always be found, but the kinds of historical concerns that animated the work of many folklorists and ethnologists prior to the middle 1970s (especially in the U.S.), are now scarce. Michael Ann Williams (2017) has written prominently of this, but it is not her view only. While those concerned about the eclipse of historical methods and concerns do not all share the same specific aspirations or remedies, there is a growing conversation among, admittedly, older folklorists about this dynamic and its implications. In engaging with world-systems analysis here, I have tried to frame the folklore and history intersection in a fresh way rather than simply arguing on the basis of the field's past accomplishments in historical work (as much as I respect those). Whatever else world-systems analysts might offer, they are insistent on the importance of a "bringing history back in" to social analysis (Goldfrank 1979).

Scale is another dynamic where folklorists would do well to reflexively assess their practices and preferences. While many folklorists (particularly, again, in the U.S.) have a sound and honorable attachment to the (often convivial) interaction order, we seem (collectively) to think comparatively little about how this world of "artistic communication in small groups" and the "practice of everyday life" articulates with wider social dynamics. As Noyes (2016: 412–416) has argued rather scathingly in her treatment of slogan concepts, even when we work on big, global issues, those we take up are often surrogates for, or derivative of, deeper and more intractable problems that we sometimes avoid engaging directly on their own terms – cultural property rather than colonialism, heritage tourism rather than poverty and inequality, etc. In no way do I want to sacrifice what makes folklore studies distinctive and compelling – what we are good at – in order to transform ourselves into a discipline like sociology that already exists. But I share what I take to be one of Noyes' points, that folklorists can always do a better job of situating the foci of our work in broader historical and social contexts. This includes attending to scales, including the global one, that are broader than, for instance, performance events and contexts. Some folklorists have been creative in thinking about social scale in folkloristic ways (Mechling 1997 is an example), but an encounter with world-systems analysis can prompt new reflection on scale and the social base of folklore. As suggested here, it also provokes fresh consideration of the serious human issues that our work might address in distinctively folkloristic or ethnological ways.

As a reviewer of this paper suggested, there is also the matter of shared interests linking the two research traditions. I pointed to a series of examples above: specifically, households, nationalism, colonialism, and decolonization, but also identities and movements for social change (for example, popular resistance, labor rights struggles, anti-systemic movements, alter-globalization). In everyday work, such shared interests are the point of intersection most likely to be taken up widely, as reading beyond our fields is less daunting when we find colleagues engaged in empirical research questions or activist scholarship that already overlaps with our concerns. Folklorists and ethnologists can profit from specific studies arising from the world-systems orientation without embracing it comprehensively as a framework. While I value my own disciplinarity and I think that I share this with my most proximate colleagues, I am also confident that my work and the work of these colleagues would be richer and more nuanced if we could manage more cross-, if not uni-, disciplinary engagement. It is my hope that such

engagements would not have to be unidirectional. As Noyes, for instance, has increasingly shown in her own work, even very globally-oriented fields such as international relations, can be engaged in such a way that folklore studies and European ethnology become inspirational for the work of such less granular fields. Reciprocal engagement does not always work, but it also does not always fail (Becker 2017; The Ohio State University 2022).

Finally, just as Wallerstein and the Gulbenkian Commissioners wanted to provoke debate in the social sciences, I am here hoping to provoke discussion and reflection among folklorists and ethnologists. Whether world-systems analysis is the best way to go about it or not, and I am not suggesting that it is, I share Fine's (2009: 103) view, with which I began: "Folklore needs to be examined as a part of the political economy of nations and of the world system". While I cannot be certain I will ever get an audience, on behalf of folklore studies and ethnology, with the core of world-systems analysts, I think also that these small (semi-peripheral?) but powerful and distinctive fields warrant their attention, whether in thinking through the bigger story of the rise and status of the capitalist world-system or the smaller, but still highly significant, story of its changing "knowledge structures."

## NOTES

1 In this work, I write from the position of a U.S. folklorist and ethnologist. This position shapes my thinking and my way of characterizing the matters under discussion, but as will hopefully be evidenced in my reflections, I have tried to maintain a wide interest in the status and history of these fields around the world. I view both fields (or in some framings, this common field) as globally networked but provincially situated. I see plurality and differences as valuable to our work and I am grateful for generous colleagues and collaborators working in various global and disciplinary locations.

2 A December 2018 search in JSTOR of key general, English-language (Anglo-American) folklore journals (*Western Folklore*, *Folklore*, *Journal of Folklore Research*, and *Journal of American Folklore*) provides some sense of past levels of engagement by folklorists with world-systems analysis. Of 23 works discovered with "world" and "systems" co-occurring, most are passing references and some are not relevant to this discussion. Some of the irrelevant instances deal with issues such as the systematic quality of worldview or lifeworlds (N=4). Some were discovered because they cited a work evoking "world system" or "world-systems analysis" in the cited work's title (N=6). Three such instances involved citation to works on ethnographic methods and writing by George Marcus (1986; 1995), where he evokes "the world system" in his titles. In five articles and two book reviews, authors evoke the world-system or world-systems analysis in a passing-but-relevant way (N=7). (I am the author of one such paper.) Finally, there is a small group of papers where engagement with world-systems issues goes beyond passing mention (N=6). This does not mean that world-systems analysis is a key matter in these works, only that the perspective is recognizable in these works on some level beyond evocation. Of these six, I feel that Hofer 1984, Limon 1983, and Samper 2002 are most relevant, with Strauss 2002, Kenny 2007, and Turgeon and Pastinelli 2002 touching on world-systems analysis mainly as a way of centering discussions of global cultural circulations of broad interest to folklorists.

As an individual named scholar, Immanuel Wallerstein appears on nine occasions in the four general folklore journals examined. Four of these instances fall into the group of works already considered. The remaining five instances break down as follows. On two occasions, authors

cited items appearing in volumes edited or co-edited by Wallerstein. In one instance, an author cited Wallerstein discussing the nature of ethnic group membership (Ivey 1977). This leaves two cases where folklore authors cited work by Wallerstein in relationship to world-systems issues. Dorothy Noyes (1995: 463) does so to evoke the complexity of unequal North–South relations and Kelly Feltault (2006: 108) does so to ground a discussion of public folklore work vis-à-vis development discourse and practice in the context of work on globalization.

3 A peer reviewer inquired about Fine’s use of “world system” without a hyphen. As evidenced in a quotation given later in this paper, the hyphen was, for Wallerstein, absolutely crucial but Fine’s usage is widespread none-the-less. Those who write “world system” rather than “world-system” are often, as here, using these words to convey a more general sense that is often cognizant of, but not formally embracing, the world-systems framework. In such usage, the general sense conveyed is of the level of social reality existing at a more encompassing level than that of individual nations viewed in analytic isolation. This is a general answer related to the wide-spread use of “world system” and Fine may have specific thoughts on the issue as yet unknown to me.

4 As of May 17, 2022, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* had been cited 5,793 times as calculated by Google Scholar. It was among the texts explored with students in a 2006 folklore studies graduate course on folklore and social/cultural theory that I taught at Indiana University. I here express appreciation to the students, now colleagues, in that course for their engaged participation, from which I benefited.

I need to offer one further note on the book itself. Appearing in 2004, Wallerstein evokes the period in which it was written and published, with terrorism and globalization looming as key global scale phenomena prominent in both media and general discussions of world affairs in that period. As I write, in 2018–2021, globalization has grown still more complicated as a matter of worldwide debate and the renewal of ethnonationalism, and even fascism, in liberal democracies looms over my own authorial present. Aged 88 at the time of my initial writing, Wallerstein then continued his research and writing, including the authoring of public-facing commentaries on world and national affairs. The most comprehensive source for these writings is his own website (see website of Immanuel Wallerstein). I mention these facts here to make clear to anyone who turns to *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* that the book is very relevant but, of course, it is not updated in its specifics to the present moment, whereas Wallerstein’s writings as a whole, are, or were. Wallerstein died on August 31, 2019 as this manuscript was circulating informally among colleagues for comment and discussion (Genzlinger 2019). His most recent book (2021) is the posthumously published volume *The Global Left: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*.

5 A version of this autobiographical sketch was also available online on the website of the Department of Sociology, Yale University, at the time of my writing. Note that the two versions differ subtly in wording, including in quotations that I give here. As will be seen below, I draw upon other works by Wallerstein and his collaborators as is useful to the endeavor. If an interested reader wished to begin with a single work, I recommend Wallerstein 2004.

6 The post-World War Two (and also post-Soviet) relationship between folklore studies and nationalism is different in other world regions, with the Baltics and China representing particular cases of special interest to me. I note this to signal my awareness of my positionality on these questions writing from within my own national and provincial context.

7 A generous peer reviewer of this paper queried whether I would be pursuing such questions in my empirical work and, if I did, what would change as a result. I can quickly illustrate these matters with two granular examples that I hope to address in future work. Among Native American peoples in Eastern Oklahoma (USA), gathering wild onions for food is both a crucial cultural practice that is central to identity and, sometimes, to subsistence. It is also the basis for a petty commodity market based on gathering from *de facto* commons. The situation there closely follows the West Virginia case documented by Hufford (2005). In Southwest China, bamboo bas-

ket production and marketing among upland minority nationalities is an extensive petty commodity trade that intersects with the larger political and economic order in ways that are also relevant to the general discussion pursued in this section of this article. Colleagues and I working in Southwest China have begun writing about these issues there (Zhang et al. forthcoming). The conceptual work of this article is intended, in part, to help my colleagues and I better address the kinds of situations encountered in our ethnographic and ethnohistorical work but that work, to this point, does not suggest any modification of the general review undertaken here. In both Eastern Oklahoma and Southwest China, there is a great deal of “making do” and I aspire to better understand it.

8 Inspired by Naithani’s work, but working at a much more modest scale, I began exploring the relationship between folklore studies and colonialism in Jackson 2013.

9 An interesting contrast with folklore studies and world-systems analysis can be found in the case of geography. Geography is also notably absent from the summary account of the social sciences that Wallerstein provides (2004: 1–12). In contrast to folklorists though, there is evidence of extensive engagements by geographers (political geographers in particular) with the approach. Geographer Colin Flint suggests that deep engagement with world-systems analysis helped strengthen and revitalize political geography in the years since work in world-system analysis began. But, the place of the perspective among political geographers has waned as, over time, these scholars engaged more fully with issues of agency and in work concerned more with micro-scale contexts. Readers interested in this contrastive history of disciplinary engagement can find it in Flint 2017.

10 To the best of my knowledge, Wallerstein does not address Michel Foucault’s notion of governmentality, but my sense is that their interests overlap in concern with the ways that structures of knowledge and the subtle workings of power and governance operate in tandem within social orders that emerge and change over time (Foucault 1991; Huff 2013).

11 European ethnology does actually appear in one passing mention in Wallerstein et al. 1996. In the conclusion of that work, the Commissioners mention, in reflecting on the opportunities for restructuring catalyzed by the fall of the Soviet Union, how the history department at Humboldt University “has become the first one in Germany, perhaps in Europe, to create a subdepartment of European ethnology, attempting thereby to give historical anthropology a *droit de cité* inside history” (Wallerstein et al. 1996: 100). I do not know the complexities of the histories that the Commissioners are evoking here, but a reading of Bendix (2012) suggests that matters in this instance are much more complex than they realize and that, had they known what folklorists and ethnologists know of such matters, their broad arguments about the social sciences as a whole might have been productively enhanced.

12 Just as Briggs and Naithani (2012) stress the colonality of folkloristics, more can certainly be said about nationalism and its entanglement with the history of ethnologies of overseas, rather than intimate, others.

13 See for instance, work cited by Briggs and Naithani (2012), Bauman and Briggs (2003), Michael Herzfeld (2012), and Simon Bronner (2006).

14 For interdisciplinarity vis-à-vis folklore studies and ethnology, see Bendix et al. 2017. Wallerstein (2004: 98) characterizes unidisciplinarity in this way:

This term should be clearly distinguished from multi- or trans-disciplinarity. The later terms refer to the now-popular ideas that much research would be better done if the researcher(s) combined the skills of two or more disciplines. Unidisciplinarity refers to the belief, in the social sciences at least, there exists today no sufficient *intellectual* reason to distinguish the separate disciplines at all, and that instead all work should be considered part of a single discipline, sometimes called the historical social sciences.



As will be discussed, the emphasis placed on intellectual here seems to acknowledge that there are structural reasons that disciplines persist none-the-less.

15 I cite three prominent position statements associated with the debate in U.S. folklore studies. Others could be included and not all views in circulation at the time were committed to print. No history of this episode has yet been written, but it is explored thoughtfully by Noyes (2012: 27–32).

16 The Gulbenkian Commission's work was a project (1994–1995) of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, a Portuguese philanthropy focused on the arts, the sciences, and education.

17 I thank a generous peer reviewer for reminding me of this key point – one central to my own teaching and curatorial work. As that reviewer aptly noted: “disciplinary legacies are inseparable from institutional legacies.”

18 What I am calling a “current call” for reassessment could be dated and framed in a number of ways. On the one hand, folklore studies is reassessing and rearranging itself on a nearly continuous basis. Graduate departments, for instance, make changes to their curriculums almost annually. On the other hand, there are periods of stasis and periods of ferment. The American Folklore Society presidency (2016–2017) of Kay Turner saw a series of sustained discussions around such things as curricular review and reform, diversification of course syllabi, and the promotion of engagement by folklorists with scholars in critical race theory and other bodies of scholarship from outside folklore itself. A provocation-rich conference organized, in part, by graduate students at Indiana University on the “Future of American Folklore,” held in Bloomington, Indiana in May 2017 provided a key moment in what I think of as an ongoing discussion about the structure of the discipline and the training leading into it.

19 For example, what lessons can we derive from the experiences of colleagues and students of the Cultural Sustainability Program that was founded by folklorists at Goucher College or of the Heritage Studies doctoral program founded with significant involvement by folklorists at Arkansas State University?

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