

REVIEW ARTICLE

RICHARD F. SZIPPL

Nanzan University, Nagoya

Folklore under Political Pressure

DOW, JAMES R. and HANNJOST LIXFELD, Editors and Translators. *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline: Folklore in the Third Reich*. Folklore Studies in Translation. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. xx + 354 pages. Index of persons, bibliography, photographs, appendix with translations, terminology, and abbreviations. Cloth US\$35.00; ISBN 0-253-31821-1.

LIXFELD, HANNJOST. *Folklore and Fascism: The Reich Institute for German Volkskunde*. Edited and translated by James R. Dow. Folklore Studies in Translation. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994. xxi + 309 pages. Index of persons, bibliography, four appendices including a list of translations, terminology, and abbreviations. Cloth US\$35.00; ISBN 0-253-33512-4. (For both publications a higher price outside North America)

JACOBETT, WOLFGANG, HANNJOST LIXFELD, and OLAF BOCKHORN, Editors (in cooperation with JAMES R. DOW). *Völkische Wissenschaft. Gestalten und Tendenzen der deutschen und österreichischen Volkskunde in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Nationalist scholarship: Personalities and tendencies in German and Austrian *Volkskunde* in the first half of the twentieth century]. Vienna, Cologne, Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1994. 733 pages. Bibliography, index of persons. Cloth ÖS980.00; ISBN 3-205-98208-8. (In German)

VERGANGENHEITSBEWÄLTIGUNG, “coming to terms with the past,” has been a controversial topic in Germany for many years as scholars, intellectuals, and public figures have faced the legacy of National Socialism. The issue gained particular prominence during the *Historikerstreit* [historians’ controversy] of 1986. The debate centered on the uniqueness of the Nazi annihilation of the Jews, that is, on whether it could be compared to other cases of genocide without somehow relativizing or diminishing its horror. Ernst NOLTE, one of the central figures in the controversy, referred to the years of National Socialism as “Vergangenheit, die nicht vergehen will” (the past that will not pass away) (1987). Indeed, the problem of the past remains ever current, having come to prominence again last year with the fiftieth anniversary of the conclusion of World War II, and more recently with the publication of Daniel GOLDHAGEN’s controversial book on the involvement of “ordinary” Germans in the Holocaust (1996).

As the three books under review here make clear, coming to terms with the past is also of great importance to scholars of German *Volkskunde*, or folklore. This is because the concerns of folklore—nation, folk, community, etc.—had a special place in National Socialist ideology, and because the institutionalization of folklore received a great boost during the Third Reich.

The central thesis of all three books is that German *Volkskunde* was hijacked by National Socialism, that it “fell prey to a perversion of its scholarly as well as its basic ethical principles. *Volkskunde* was taken in by a National Socialist scholarship whose ideological and methodological foundations it had helped prepare,” and whose objectives “were to acquire legitimacy through scholarly works that could then be employed by the fascist regime” (DOW and LIXFELD 1994, 264). This flies directly in the face of the commonly held notion that there were two distinct folklores in Nazi Germany—a legitimate, scholarly folklore coexisting alongside an ideologically perverted, methodologically compromised National Socialist folklore. The strength of this notion, these books argue, made it possible for the discipline of folklore in the German-speaking countries to largely avoid com-

ing to terms with the relationship of folklore and National Socialism.

In the 1980s, however, several events (in particular a 1986 meeting in Munich of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde) forced folklorists to face the issue head on, unleashing a fierce debate. The explicit aim of the first two books is to present the terms of the debate to a wider international audience, making known the results of recent scholarship on the role of folklore in National Socialism and showing how a biased ideology can penetrate and exploit a scholarly field.

The first book of the English pair, *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline*, is a collection of essays previously published in German by German and Austrian folklorists. Several of the pieces were originally presented at the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Volkskunde's 1986 meeting on the theme of "Volkskunde und Nationalsozialismus." Four essays serve as an introduction to the topic. The first is *Helge Gerndt's* opening lecture at the Munich meeting. It proposes several theses regarding the scope and object of study, and stresses that the purpose must not be to judge and condemn but to remind present scholars of the need to be alert and self-critical. The second essay, originally published in 1965 by *Hermann Bausinger*, is considered one of the pioneering efforts to explore the relationship between folklore and National Socialism and demonstrate how numerous themes of Nazi folk ideology, such as nation, race, and peasantry, were present in German folklore from the beginning of the twentieth century and earlier. The third essay, a 1965 piece by *Wolfgang Emmerich*, investigates the question of continuity between the ancient Germanic tribes and the present-day German people and its importance for the symbol-laden Germanic cult of the National Socialists. The fourth essay, a paper by *Hermann Strobach* originally delivered at the 1986 meeting, shows how the basically conservative outlook on society present in German folklore of the late 1920s and early 1930s, especially with regard to the peasantry and the urban working class, was easily coopted by the National Socialists.

The body of the book is comprised of six detailed studies of German folklore in the National Socialist period. The essay by *Christoph Daxmelmüller*, also delivered at the 1986 meeting, describes the "erasure" of Jewish folklore that resulted from the anti-Jewish tendencies of early twentieth-century German folklore as well as the deliberate National Socialist program of confiscating materials and closing Jewish folklore institutes. *Hermann Bausinger's* essay, another paper presented at Munich, describes how "folk-national" work was conducted in the National Socialist period, and discusses its activities, principles and aims. The essay by *Rolf Wilhelm Brednich*, first published in 1985, describes the Weigel Symbol Archive (a collection of photographs of folklore symbols) and shows the dilettantism

with which symbol research was conducted during the National Socialism period. *Peter Assion's* essay, dating from 1985, discusses Eugen Fehrle, the chief ideologist of National Socialist folklore, and his efforts to utilize folklore in fashioning the new Reich. The next two essays, by *Olaf Bockhorn* and *Helmut Eberhart*, describe the situation of scholarly folklore in Austria, showing how National Socialist folklore, whose way was in part paved by the Viennese School of folklore, established itself in Austrian universities by utilizing existing structures and personnel. *Anka Oesterle's* essay, which combines the content of her lecture at the Munich meeting with supporting material from a master's thesis, deals with the establishment and goals of the SS Office of Ancestral Inheritance, another National Socialist folklore institution. The next to last essay, by *Wolfgang Jacobeit*, provides an interesting account of folklore in the German Democratic Republic during the early postwar years by tracing the activities of Adolf Spamer and Wolfgang Steinitz, directors of the Folklore Commission of the German Academy of Sciences in Berlin.

The final essay, written by the editors/translators and previously published in *Asian Folklore Studies*, was originally intended as the book's introduction. Here it attempts to conclude the volume by putting the other contributions into the wider context of the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* debate. For those unacquainted with the subject, however, it might have been better if the essay had been used as originally intended, since it provides a good examination of the attempts during the 1950s and 1960s to gloss over the willing and open cooperation of folklorists with the National Socialist regime, of the challenges to these attempts by Heinz Maus, Hermann Bausinger, and Wolfgang Emmerich, and of the emerging discussions in the 1980s. The issue remains disputed and the exchanges heated, as shown by the events of the recent *Volkskundlerstreit* (folklorists' battle) (288-90).

The publication of these translations will go a long way towards opening the debate to English-reading circles. The extensive bibliography is especially helpful in introducing the literature on the Nazification process in folklore and academia. The glossary is also helpful, providing the English reader with a substantial list of terms, institutional names, and National Socialist jargon.

The companion book, *Folklore and Fascism*, is an in-depth study of the main arguments against the notion of two folklores. By tracing the history of the Reich Institute for German Folklore, a nationwide umbrella organization for folklore, the book shows how many of the concepts of folklore lent themselves to manipulation by a fascist ideology eager to promote its own worldview. The book focuses on such scholars as John Meier and Adolf Spamer, who cooperated with the National Socialist regime in the hopes of

furthering the institutionalization of folklore.

The book also goes into much detail on the folklore research of two competing Nazi ideologists, Alfred Rosenberg (the Führer's Commissioner for Supervision of All Intellectual and Worldview Schooling and Education of the NSDAP) and Heinrich Himmler (head of the SS Office of Ancestral Inheritance). These two struggled for domination by maneuvering their people into various teaching positions and institutional posts throughout the Reich. The rivalry was based on differing ideological/methodological approaches as well as on personality conflicts. Rosenberg's "brown" folklore—so named because of the brown uniforms of his officials—emphasized ideological purity and relied heavily on the "mythological school" of Viennese folklorists, who posited the priority of myth over cultic groups. Himmler's "black" folklore was based on a competing school of "ritualists" who maintained the precedence of cults over the mythic sagas. The book shows how Rosenberg attempted to dominate institutional folklore through a planned folklore institute to be part of a new university for the Reich.

I found the description of the political infighting a bit tedious at times. Also, the book ends quite abruptly with the collapse of the Reich. A concluding section summarizing the main points of the discussion would have given more clarity and focus to the work.

The third book under review, *Völkische Wissenschaft*, is a cooperative effort by scholars from Austria, the U.S.A., and the former German Democratic Republic and Federal Republic of Germany. The aim of the book is similar to the two discussed above: to show both the "academic achievements and social failure" (JACOBET et al., 11) of folklore by shedding light on the relationship between folklorists and the National Socialists. In so doing it too rejects the conventional interpretation of "two folklores." The book concentrates on the years between the two world wars, but also includes essays surveying the development of folklore in the first two decades of the postwar years. As such it provides a starting point for future studies of the history of folklore scholarship in the second half of the twentieth century.

The section on Germany begins with a contribution by *Peter Assion* and *Reinhard Schmook* on the careers of three prominent folklore scholars of the early twentieth century: Hans Naumann, Julius Schwietering, and Adolph Spamer. It shows how the scholars were led to accept and even cooperate with the NS regime because of affinities between their ideas and Nazi ideology, and because of promises of government support for their projects and folklore scholarship. All eventually fell out with the regime in varying degrees because of ideological differences and personal jealousies, giving rise to the legend of the two folklores after the war.

A contribution by *Christoph Daxelmüller* focuses on the efforts of a non-professional folklorist, the Hamburg and Vienna rabbi Max Grunwald, whose folklore institute tried through its publications and exhibitions to counter anti-Semitic prejudice and strengthen Jewish identity.

The last contribution of this section, by *Martin Seckendorf*, describes the organization, goals, and activities of the Deutsches Ausland-Institut, one of the largest and most prominent unofficial organizations dealing with German minorities abroad. Its libraries, archives, press, information section, and programs for training teachers were aimed at promoting a national consciousness among Germans outside the country. The institution was thus of great value to the National Socialist regime, which succeeded in taking it over after some initial conflicts with the leadership.

The second section, dealing with the actual period of the Nazi regime, consists of the content of Hannjost Lixfeld's *Folklore and Fascism*, reviewed above, with an added section by *Gisela Lixfeld* describing Himmler's Office of Ancestral Inheritance.

The third section treats the attempts of folklorists to come to terms with the past and make new beginnings in the early postwar years. It begins with a German version of Lixfeld and Dow's essay in *The Nazification of an Academic Discipline*, discussed above. This is followed by an essay by *Thomas Scholze* describing the developments in folklore scholarship at Tübingen University in the 1960s and 1970s. It shows how the student movement, organizational and institutional reform of the discipline, as well as theoretical and methodological innovations all helped to reorient folklore towards a more interdisciplinary approach that sought insights into the present-day life of social groups and institutions. Folklore thus came to see itself as an empirical cultural science capable of taking a position critical of culture, and thus of its own past. The section concludes with an essay by *Ute Mohrmann* on the development of folklore scholarship in the former German Democratic Republic in the 1950s and 1960s. It gives a good description of how folklore shifted from its traditional concerns toward a study of life-style, the working class, and the historical structure of culture. This process was complicated by the political and social situation of the postwar years as well as by the restrictions imposed by the Marxist approach to scholarship.

Part 2 of the book deals with folklore in Austria. This section is in many ways better organized and better written than the section on Germany. Since in most cases a given topic is followed through different time periods by the same author, there tends to be more continuity in the presentation. The first section deals with the development of institutional folklore from the turn of the century to the *Anschluß* (annexation) of 1938, focusing on folklore in Graz (*Helmut Eberhart*), Innsbruck (*Reinhard Johler*), Salzburg (*Helmut*

Eberhart) and Vienna (*Olaf Bockhorn*). In general the relationship of Austrian folklore to National Socialism was similar to that of German folklore, with such things as a bourgeois-national consciousness and pan-German ideas easily lending themselves to manipulation by the Nazi regime. The hope of advancing institutional folklore through the regime was also an added incentive for folklorists to cooperate. A peculiarly Austrian problem was the breakup of the monarchy after World War I, which led many to look toward a *Großdeutschland* as a solution to the loss of national identity. Many nationally oriented folklorists, by creating the atmosphere of an "internal" *Anschluß*, helped pave the way to eventual formal annexation.

Folklore in Graz was represented by Viktor Geramb. His romantic view of the peasantry as the basis of folklore and his understanding of Austrians as members of a German nation had close affinities to National Socialist thought and helped pave the way for the Nazi takeover. In Salzburg the growing influence of National Socialism led to the founding of a religious folklore institute as a counterweight to Nazi ideology. Centered on the speaking and publishing activity of Hanns Koren, it stressed the central role of religion in culture as opposed to National Socialist ideas of race and biology.

Folklore in Innsbruck, close to the German border and near Südtirol, played an important role in promoting a German-national consciousness. Scholars like Hermann Wopfner and Adolf Helbok were preconditioned to cooperate with the National Socialist folklore by their own historical orientation, by their work on the peasant communities of Südtirol, and by their hopes for the *Anschluß* of Tirol, Voralberg, and eventually Südtirol.

There were in Vienna, as mentioned above, two competing schools of folklore, the "ritualists" (centered around Rudolf Much) and the "mythologists" (represented by Leopold von Schroeder and Georg Hüsig), both of which were easily appropriated by the National Socialists. Also active in Vienna were Michael and Arthur Haberlandt, who, as directors of a museum for Austrian folklore and Privatdozenten, practiced an ethnological approach to folklore. This section of the book also contains a biographical sketch of Friederich Salomon Krauss by *Christoph Daxelmüller* that offers a corrective to the conventional view of Krauss as a dilettantish collector of pornographic folklore. Krauss, Daxelmüller points out, made studies of Slavic and Gypsy folklore and used a supranational, supraconfessional, and present-oriented approach that anticipated later developments in folklore.

The different situations in the various parts of the country during the years of the Third Reich were reflected in the various directions that folklore took during the period. As in Germany, many scholars, after initially welcoming the new regime, found themselves shunted aside. Viktor Geramb, despite his open approval of the *Anschluß*, was within a year and a half

deprived of his teaching position and restricted in his scholarly activity. Later, however, he reluctantly agreed to cooperate with the Rosenberg Bureau, the very organization responsible for his removal, and worked on the Steiermark and Kärnten sections of a series describing the houses and farms of peasants in various regions of the Reich.

In Innsbruck, Adolf Helbok, who had been forced to leave his post in 1934 because of his National Socialist leanings (he had become a German citizen and a member of the NSDAP), returned and eventually replaced Hermann Wopfner. Wopfner was relieved of teaching duties but continued his work on the *Siedlungsgeschichte* of Südtirol, which was of special interest to the regime. Helbok became Ordinarius for folklore and set up a folklore institute to promote the Nazi agenda.

The religious folklore institute of Hanns Koren at Salzburg was an obvious target for Nazi takeover. Its leadership was assumed by Richard Wolfram, who worked in the SS Office of Ancestral Inheritance. He eventually moved the institute to Vienna, leaving behind only a small outpost that had to struggle against the influence of the folklore institute run by the Rosenberg Bureau. In Vienna Wolfram set up an institute for Germanic-German folklore. Spared from military service, he collected folklore materials and worked on two commissions for resettling ethnic Germans from Südtirol and Gottschee.

Part 3 of the book deals with the first two decades of the postwar era. As we have seen, folklorists in Germany have had a difficult time coming to terms with the cooperation between institutional folklore and National Socialism. This is even more the case in Austria, where in the postwar period most folklorists returned to their original teaching positions so that theoretical/methodological tendencies remained much the same. In Graz, unlike Innsbruck or Vienna, no professorship in folklore had been established during the Third Reich period, so Viktor Geramb was able not only to return to teaching but to realize his goal of becoming Ordinarius for folklore. He worked hard to build up folklore as an academic discipline while maintaining his interest in promoting folklore on the popular level. He was out of the scene by the end of the 1950s, however, and folklore in Graz made no new advances until the early 1970s. Adolf Helbok lost his position in Innsbruck but was able to rehabilitate himself to a certain degree, working on a folklore atlas and becoming president of the *Kommission für den Volkskundeatlas in Österreich*. Other folklorists, like Wopfner, also returned to their posts and continued their traditional work on peasants in an attempt to help form a new Austrian national consciousness.

Gertraud Liesenfeld and *Herbert Nikitsch* describe how in Vienna the work of Leopold Schmidt on *Großstadtvölkskunde* opened a new area of

research. Basing his ideas not on fieldwork but on an analysis of various mass media, Schmidt saw in modern urban culture a new area for folklore research. In Innsbruck Richard Wolfram was able to restart his career in 1954 and resume work on his areas of concern—continuity, tradition, and community. A breakthrough toward a more democratic, cultural-historical critical approach was made by Helmut P. Fielhauer, an assistant at Wolfram's institute. Fielhauer, who was one of the initial planners of this book, died suddenly in 1987.

As a whole, this book provides insights into the nature of folklore studies in the first half of the twentieth century and fills in the picture sketched by the first book, especially in its treatment of folklore in Austria. However, its discussion of the theoretical and methodological aspects of folklore may be a little tedious to the nonexpert. Like many collaborative efforts the book suffers from some unevenness, especially in the part dealing with Germany. True to its subtitle, "Gestalten und Tendenzen," it does not present a complete history, but instead emphasizes individual folklorists, trends in theory and methodology, and the early development of institutional folklore. Still, it represents a very good treatment of the relationship between folklore and National Socialism and thus a serious attempt to come to terms with the past. At the same time, it serves as an excellent reminder to present-day scholars of the need to reflect on the ideological and political implications of their work. The book provides a good starting point for the study of the second half of the twentieth century, a start that deserves to be followed up.

Taken together, these three books provide much insight into the process of how an academic discipline goes about examining its past, especially a past as problematic as that of folklore under National Socialism. As such these books will be of interest not only to folklorists but to students of modern Germany as well.

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