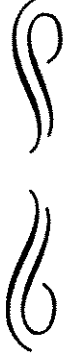


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# WESTERN FOLKLORE



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address more directly the continuities and differences between participation in fan costuming and the creation of "folk" costumes in ethnic communities or the enactment of historic identities (such as in Civil War battle groups). Does it matter that the identities being performed come from contemporary television and are futuristic rather than historical? What does it tell us about modern mediated culture that the most powerful mythologies in our lives often come from the mass media rather than from older folk traditions? These are questions the book poses, but never satisfactorily answers.

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*Folklore Fights the Nazis. Humor in Occupied Norway, 1940-1945.* By Kathleen Stokker. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. Pp. 273. Illustrations, Bibliography, Index. \$17.95 paper)

In this handsome paperback edition of an earlier hardback edition (1995), Kathleen Stokker introduces a fascinating aspect of Norway's history during the Second World War. Stokker illustrates how jokes and other aspects of folk culture were mobilized in resistance to the Nazi occupation. On April 9, 1940, Hitler's forces, in a surprise move, invaded Norway, and thus began a dark period in Norwegian history that would last until eventual liberation on May 7, 1945. Although the initial invasion was met by an armed resistance that lasted nearly two months (a contrast to the steamroller invasion of Denmark which left very little time for anything resembling an armed defense of the borders), once the Nazi war machine was ensconced in Norway, it met very little in the way of a coordinated, armed resistance. Indeed, as Stokker mentions, there was considerable collaboration with the Nazis among the Norwegian populace—if not outright collaboration, then at least tacit acceptance of the occupation. As the war progressed, however, and the occupying forces began to show their true colors, an ever growing segment of the population began to resist the occupiers in numerous ways. Informal acts of resistance, and jokes and stories of these informal acts, emerged over the course of the occupation as significant expressions of the resistance. Stokker identifies the *Jössing* as "those opposed to Nazism" (27), and a great deal of her work explores *Jössing* humor. Stokker does not stop with an evaluation of jokes and narratives, however, but also includes fascinating glimpses of visual culture such as posters and political cartoons. It is this multi-layered representation of the forms and uses of humor in occupied Norway that contribute to the success of her work.

Finding source materials for a study of this nature is a difficult task, as many of those who lived through the occupation are now old and their jokes and stories may well have faded from their memory. Indeed, contemporary interviews with occupation survivors would give only a poor reflection of a lively folk cul-

ture. Yet, during the occupation, recording occupation humor would have been a risky undertaking given the harsh punishments prescribed for those who were engaged in resistance activities. Luckily, Stokker is a gifted sleuth and, in her numerous field work excursions to Norway, was able to discover five previously unpublished diaries that record not only wartime jokes but also observations on day-to-day life in occupied Norway. Through these diaries, what otherwise could only have been a study of faded memories, Stokker discovers clear voices of resistance that, even in the face of Nazi occupation, are able to find humor and, through that humor, create a community of opposition and hope. An intriguing aspect of these joke collections/diaries is that all were written by women, a significant fact that, regrettably, Stokker only comments on in passing. Perhaps because Stokker is interested in documenting the broad contours of humor in occupied Norway, she decided not to link her study to the broader field of women's personal/private writing.

Indeed, Stokker's work is far ranging—the diaries are a jumping off point for a considerably detailed view of both narrative and humor in wartime Norway. Stokker includes considerations of domestic politics, detailing the attacks on figures such as the traitorous Vidkun Quisling; day-to-day life among the occupying forces, including the uncomfortable phenomenon of the *Tyskertøs*, young women who had amorous liaisons with German soldiers; and humorous examinations of wartime developments, from the initial, contemptuous reactions to Germany's successes to the joyful gloating over Germany's eventual demise. Stokker identifies the streetcar, or the *trikk*, as a focus for a great deal of low-level, interpersonal resistance activity—the *is-front* (cold shoulder) treatment of German officers on the streetcar, the amusing quips launched at humorless Nazis, and other such events—all of which contribute to an image of the streetcar as a rolling challenge to the occupation.

In her conclusion, Stokker reconsiders the cherished image of the Norwegian resistance first iterated by Fredrik Dahl (1974), an image that he suggests is a later construct and not borne out by the historical record. Dahl notes that: (1) the Norwegians did not immediately begin the resistance upon occupation; (2) the parliament did not protect law and order, but rather was complicit in deposing the exiled King; (3) the entire population did not resist. Quite the contrary, with sixty thousand Norwegians joining the Nazi party, (4) the activities of the resistance did little harm to the German occupiers; (5) the Norwegians collaborated with the Germans simply by continuing to engage in economic activity that ultimately fed the German machine, and, (6) the country did not emerge unscathed, as nearly half of all Norwegian Jews were killed by the Nazis (212-213). Stokker adequately addresses these important issues, and reveals how humor helped perpetrate the romantic image of the Norwegian resistance. As such, Stokker avoids the pitfall of simply reiterating an idyllic view of the Norwegian response to the occupation.

Stokker's work is an intriguing addition to our growing understanding of Scandinavia during the Second World War. Her focus on the contours of day-to-day life, with an emphasis on the use of humor during difficult times, is

valuable approach that enlivens what in the general historical literature are at times dry, humorless accounts of the contours of international history. Beyond folklore courses, for which this book has immediate appeal, Stokker's book could easily be incorporated into courses on European history. Perhaps the one drawback I found with the book is the length of the footnotes. Much of the material relegated to the footnotes could have been incorporated directly into the text, thus avoiding the awkward page flipping that accompanied my reading. Stokker's exhaustive bibliography and helpful index more than mitigate this one problem. The reproductions of cartoons and posters are an excellent addition to this intriguing work. All in all, Stokker has done a great service to folklorists, historians, and Scandinavianists alike with her lively, engaging, and information-filled examination of Norwegian occupation humor.

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## Film Reviews

*Voices of the Orishas*. 1994. Directed by Alvaro Pérez Betancourt. 37 min. 1/2" Video, Color. Distributed by University of California Extension Center for Media and Independent Learning, 2000 Center Street, Berkeley, CA 94704. (510) 642-0460. \$195. Rental: \$60

*Voices of the Orishas* straddles the boundary between ethnographic, documentary and fictional film genres in what appears to be an exploration into new ways of telling folkloric stories. Written, produced, and directed by graduate student Alvaro Perez Betancourt at USC's Center for Visual Anthropology, and funded by the Consejo Nacional de la Cultura (CONAC) in Caracas, Venezuela, the film offers a look at Santería (La Regla de Ocha or Lucumi as participants prefer to call their religion) as practiced in Cuba.

Filmed in Cuba, *Voices of the Orishas* combines interviews with a Santería priest, a Santería *akuopon* (lead singer), and a Santería scholar with staged footage to show the myth of Shango (the deity of thunder and lightning) and the fire. The film takes its cue from an interview comment stating, "It seems when we are very involved with our orishas, and our most powerful myths, we become part of the story." Betancourt tries to involve his audience in this powerful myth depicting Shango's fight with Ogun (the deity of iron and war) from the start. He chooses to open with Shango, Oya (the female deity of the winds and storm), and Ogun dancing to Yoruba singing and drumming in "nature." Elpidio Cardena, a priest of Santería, explains that "when nature appeared, this religion appeared." By asserting that his religion emerged at the moment of creation, and thereby declaring it as the oldest of religions, Cardena gives supremacy over the church made by man which, he states, has historically tried to suppress La Regla de Ocha as well as stolen its secrets.

Betancourt's decision to begin the film, though, with a staged dance proves problematic in trying to introduce La Regla de Ocha (called Santería by the filmmakers) to a student audience, precisely because the audience does not yet know the myth behind the dance. Expectations of ethnographic portrayals also keep the audience from fully becoming involved with the orishas and the myth, and, thereby, becoming part of the story. The biggest hindrance to this filmic choice, however, comes from Betancourt's failure to heed another cue given throughout the film—the importance of Yoruba singing and Yoruba drumming. Betancourt chooses to augment the soundtrack with "Hollywood" music, making the opening at times reminiscent of B-

movies. The strength of *Voices of the Orishas*, though, is its emphasis on the innova-