

REVIEW ARTICLE

A DISCONCERTING LIFE

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UDO MISCHEK, *Leben und Werk Günter Wagners (1908–1952)*. Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für Ethnologie der Universität Leipzig. Reihe Fachgeschichte. Band 2. Gehren: Escher Verlag, 2002, 293 pp., €51.20, ISBN 3 932642 21 X.

For anthropologists who, like me, wanted to do fieldwork in western Kenya in the 1950s and 1960s the voluminous monograph in two parts on the Bantu of North Kavirondo by Günter Wagner (1949, 1956) was an indispensable source of information. It covered the area known as North Nyanza District in the late colonial period and Western Province after independence. By 1970 the demand for it, probably stimulated by interest in Africa in general and the expansion of university courses dealing with this continent, even warranted a reprint in one volume under the title: *The Bantu of Western Kenya, with Special Reference to the Vugusu and Logoli*. Wagner's research had been part of the International African Institute's research programme of the 1930s sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation and directed by Malinowski.

From the foreword to the second volume, written by Daryll Forde as the director of the International African Institute, one could learn that Wagner had died in 1952, at the age of 44 and had been employed at that time as an ethnologist by the South African Native Affairs Department in Windhoek, in what is now Namibia. Forde also mentioned that Wagner had received his early training in anthropology, psychology and linguistics at Freiburg and Hamburg and had undertaken post-graduate studies at Columbia University, New York. In 1939 he had returned to Germany 'to write up his material'. The German text of what was published as Volume I of *The Bantu of North Kavirondo* in 1949 in England was also printed in Germany during the war.¹ The typescript of the English version and one copy of the German printed text were received after the Institute had been able to get in

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¹ According to Forde, the printing works at Stuttgart were destroyed in 1942 on the eve of publication, but printing was resumed in 1944 and completed in 1945. This is not entirely correct. The printing had been completed in 1942 but almost the entire stock was lost due to a bomb attack on Stuttgart, with the exception of a copy printed separately for proof reading purposes. There was no reprint (Mischek, 2002: 104).

touch with Wagner in November 1945. After completing the typescript of Volume I, Wagner wrote a number of chapters for Volume II but he did not find sufficient time to complete all of them before his death. What had been received by the International African Institute was edited by Lucy Mair and appeared in print in 1956.

In his foreword, Forde also mentions a projected third volume which might well have been devoted to Wagner's linguistic studies, containing a grammar and vernacular texts with translation. Wagner had left his linguistic notebooks at the Institute of African Languages and Cultures of Hamburg University, where Professor Lukas began editing the Logoli texts. For that purpose he invoked the help of Professor Tucker of the School of Oriental and African Studies, who improved the spelling and word division with the aid of a Kenyan student who happened to originate from the Logoli area. However, Professor Lukas did not find the time for a final editing for publication. It was Professor Whiteley who drew my attention to this work when I met him in Nairobi in 1969, while I was working in the National Archives in between two fieldwork periods among the Bukusu (spelt 'Vugusu' by Wagner). These were the people among whom Wagner spent most of his second period of fieldwork from August 1937 until May 1938. The first period, from September 1934 until February 1936, was mainly devoted to the Logoli (Mischek, 2002: 72–3, 62–6).

One of the reasons for my going to the Bukusu area had in fact been the monograph by Wagner. He would provide a baseline for the study of social change, which was my special topic of interest. However, although much of the data in Wagner's books referred specifically to the Bukusu, it was sometimes difficult to decide if his generalisations on all the Kenya Luyia—or Luhya, as the Bantu Kavirondo had become known by then—also applied to them. That was something I wanted to find out, apart from also making a restudy of those aspects of Bukusu life on which the information given by Wagner was copious and specific. I certainly wanted to avoid the situation in which former assistants of Wagner would also become my main informants. Actually, quite at the beginning of my field research, I was introduced to Javan Nandoli, whom Wagner mentions by name in the preface to Volume I. I decided to keep my distance, but now feel that this was a missed opportunity to gain a deeper insight into the circumstances under which Wagner collected his data. At the time, I considered this less important than avoiding contaminating my own research.

Even so my first host, Pascal Nabwana, in whose compound I stayed during the first eight months of my research, provided me with his life story, written with the help of a well-educated youngster from his family (a grandson of his brother). Thirty years earlier he had done the same for Wagner when attending Jeanes School (de Wolf, 1977: 49, 177–8; cf. Wagner, 1956: 38). It was a pleasant surprise when I found this text among the Bukusu material which was kept at Hamburg and which I was allowed to copy and use, when in 1981 it turned out that nobody else would be able to do anything with it in the foreseeable future. First of all I edited this story and distributed copies among colleagues. When

in 1992 I visited the site of my earlier fieldwork, I also presented them to relatives and friends of Pascal Nabwana, who had died in 1984. The notebooks containing folk stories, written down and translated by two African assistants, took a long time to transcribe and edit. They were published in 1995 (de Wolf, 1995).

The linguistic notebooks contained no reference to the contexts in which the material was collected. Even the assistants remained anonymous. As the value of the publication of this material would be enhanced by more information on these aspects, I made contact with Mrs. von Pape, Wagner's daughter. She wrote that, as far as she knew, her father's notes and manuscripts which had been in the possession of the family when he died, had been sent to the International African Institute. In London one was unable to locate anything of the kind in the archives of the Institute, but Mrs. Von Pape had also told me that her mother, who accompanied Wagner during his first field trip, had kept a diary. Mrs. Wagner had some doubt about the usefulness of this document for my research, but I decided that the more I could get to know about Günter Wagner and his way of doing research, the better it would be, even if the second trip was not covered. So she graciously consented to send me a copy.

True, the contents were not at all sensational, nor did they reveal much about subjective feelings, except sometimes in rather indirect ways. But the diary allowed one to trace from day to day the whereabouts of the Wagners, to see how their African neighbours let them participate in local events and to understand more about the role of the two main Logoli research assistants whom Wagner employed (cf. Mischek, 2002: 62–72). Historical research covering this period of Wagner's fieldwork conducted in the 1970s made it possible to contextualise many remarks about important local leaders, missionaries and administrators (see Bode, 1978; Gilpin, 1976).

What was lacking, though, was a biography of Günter Wagner himself. There were only a few tantalising fragments. Apart from the remarks by Forde that I have already referred to, I also knew for instance that he wrote his Ph.D. thesis at Hamburg University on the Peyote Cult, but I assumed that it had been based purely on secondary sources (Wagner, 1932). From Fischer's study of Nazism and ethnology, which appeared in 1990, I learned that Wagner had become a lecturer at Tübingen after his return to Germany in 1939, had been working on colonial affairs in the ministry of propaganda and had also joined the army (Fischer, 1990: 245). There were, however, no indications that Wagner's work was in any way influenced by Nazism. An article on quantitative methods which appeared in 1942 (Wagner, 1942) could just as well have been published in a British periodical bearing the same date.

With the publication of Udo Mischek's *Leben und Werk Günter Wagners (1908–1952)* (2002), a slightly revised version of his 1999 Leipzig Ph.D. thesis, we are now able to cover many of the gaps in his biography. Mischek's account had two main surprises in store for me. First of all, before his work in Africa, Wagner had studied under Boas at

Columbia University starting in September 1927. While in the United States he did fieldwork among the Yuchi Indians of Oklahoma, June–September 1928 and January–March 1929. This resulted in the publication of a collection of Yuchi texts and a Yuchi grammar (Wagner, 1931, 1934). A Yuchi dictionary was completed but never published. Hence the reference in Mrs. Wagner's diary to a manuscript which she helped her husband to prepare during their first months in Kenya, which puzzled me when I first read it. Wagner had started to study at university only in 1926. He stayed for two semesters at Freiburg and then went to Hamburg, where he cannot have completed more than one further semester. His subsequent stay in America can therefore hardly be called 'post-graduate', as Forde did (Mischek, 2002: 28–31, 159–60; Forde, 1956).

Wagner also collected material on the Peyote cult among the Yuchi. In this way Wagner could satisfy to some extent the wishes of Professor Thilenius of Hamburg University, who had arranged his stay with Boas. One of the aims of Thilenius had been for Wagner to study problems of Europeanisation among a group of North-American Indians. However, Boas could only get funds for linguistic research. The Ph.D. thesis which Wagner completed at Hamburg incorporated his own findings, but also those of other scholars such as Mooney, Benedict and Radin (Wagner, 1932; cf. Mischek, 2002: 33–6, 151–5).

When Wagner received a Rockefeller fellowship after completing his Ph.D. in 1932 he first went back to the United States, where he again did field research, this time among the Comanche. He also studied at Berkeley with Lowie and Kroeber. Interestingly enough, Boas was of the opinion that this would be a waste of time. However, Wagner felt that he had to comply with the wishes of the funding agency, which wanted him to spend some time at an American university and he tried to soothe Boas's feelings with the argument that he would devote his time at Berkeley to preparing his Yuchi grammar (Mischek, 2002: 41–4).

The second part of his fellowship was then spent at London in preparation for his African fieldwork. In fact, he travelled there on the same boat that took Malinowski home in 1933. Wagner had already been introduced to him at Chicago and he used this opportunity to familiarise himself more thoroughly with a kind of anthropology which Malinowski himself saw as quite distinct from what was being done by Boas and his students (Mischek, 2002: 44–5). Wagner absorbed Malinowski's point of view astonishingly quickly. Especially with regard to the study of what Malinowski liked to call 'culture contact', he wrote in 1938 that he could not agree more with Wagner, who was even more correct than Fortes, both of whom were compared with Monica Hunter and Lucy Mair, who came in for a fair amount of criticism (Malinowski, 1938). Indeed, from his African publications one would probably never guess that Wagner had ever been influenced by Boas. Yet his relationship with Boas was much more personal than with Malinowski, at least to judge from the extant correspondence which Wagner had with both (Mischek, 2002: 225–9, 230–2).

Wagner met Boas when the latter visited Germany in 1929, 1930 and 1932. In that last year, Wagner even went to Bremen to welcome him at the docks. During his travels in Germany in those years, Boas publicly opposed the racism of the Nazis at meetings and in lectures. Mischek cites as an example Boas's lecture when in 1931 Jena University celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the award of his doctorate (Mischek, 2002: 227; cf. Boas, 1932). Wagner communicated several times his own unease with the rise of Nazism to him. One reason that Wagner kept in contact with Boas was his hope of being able to get an appointment outside Germany with his help. However, this was to no avail. When his contract with the International African Institute expired in September 1938, he must have decided that there might be no other option than to return to Germany, and if so that he had better prepare for an academic career there, even though that would mean becoming a member of the Nazi party and at least pretending that he subscribed wholeheartedly to its ideology (Mischek, 2002: 227–29, 78–80).

Although Wagner's publications on Kenya turned away from Boasian anthropology, some characteristics of his fieldwork were clearly influenced by his American experiences. Boas had provided him with the basic skills for tackling linguistic problems. Wagner devoted much time not only to learning to speak the native language but also to understanding its grammar. Collecting texts was an important tool in this respect. He also made a point of recording some extended life stories. Finally one gains the impression that much about the culture was learned through the systematic interviewing of a few key informants, in the way salvage ethnography was practised in the American Indian reserves, rather than as a result of participant observation (cf. Mischek, 2002: 161–2).

During his first extended break from fieldwork, Wagner wrote a long and very favourable review (Wagner, 1937) of Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande*. He refers to the request to do this as 'a fortunate coincidence' because it provided a great stimulus for 'the study of the magico-religious side of native life' (Wagner, 1949: v). Wagner also visited Evans-Pritchard at Oxford. In a letter written to Boas at this time, he expressed the hope that he would be able to participate in the new research programme in social anthropology which was to accompany Radcliffe-Brown's appointment there. He told Boas that he would like to become less dependent on Malinowski whom he had started to find with time somewhat irksome (Mischek, 2002: 74). In this way Wagner became associated with the structural turn in British functionalist anthropology heralded by the departure of Malinowski for America and the return of Radcliffe-Brown to England. Wagner's importance to his British Africanist colleagues is well documented by the efforts of the editors of *African Political Systems* and especially of Meyer Fortes to have his contribution included in that collection. As war had already been declared and Wagner had become technically an enemy, special permission had to be asked from the Press and Censorship Bureau (Mischek, 2002: 77–78; cf. Wagner, 1940a). Wagner also took part in the Oxford Summer School for Colonial

Administration, together with Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard and Fortes (Mischek, 2002: 75–6; cf. Wagner, 1938).

Between Wagner's first and second trips, a daughter had been born, and Wagner's wife stayed with her at the home of her parents near Hamburg when Wagner went back to Kenya in July 1937. Having returned to London in June 1938, the family lived there for a while but in September of that year, they were again in Hamburg. In March 1939, Wagner himself went back to London for a last visit before the war broke out. In Germany he applied for a fellowship to complete his *Habilitation*, which he needed in order to qualify for an appointment at a German university. The main requirement was the presentation of a substantial piece of original research. However, he failed to get any money. It is unclear whether the ministry of education had run out of funds, as it told the vice-chancellor of Berlin University who had made an application on Wagner's behalf, or whether the ministry did not dare to take a decision in his favour when a positive recommendation of the expatriate branch of the Nazi party was not (yet?) available. The money which Wagner had saved from his IAI allowances was running out and in the meantime war had broken out. According to Mischek there existed a real possibility that Wagner might be drafted (Mischek, 2002: 82–3). Although Wagner's father was a main partner in a firm producing mosaic decorations for important buildings, which was prospering during the Nazi regime, he seems to have been unable or unwilling to help his youngest son (cf. Mischek, 2002: 25–7).

However that may be, it came as another surprise for me to learn that at this point in his career, in December 1939, Wagner joined an organisation controlled and funded by the ministry of propaganda called the *Antisemitische Aktion*. This was a so-called *eingetragener Verein*, 'chartered association', and had come into existence as the result of a fusion of two other associations, also connected with the ministry of propaganda. One was concerned with the study of the 'Jewish problem', the other with counteracting international communism. We do not know what kind of work Wagner had to do, but at that time a major task of the *Antisemitische Aktion* was to prepare a defence against disapproval of the Madagascar plan which was expected to be voiced in the United States. This plan aimed at a forced resettlement in Madagascar of all the Jews from countries under Nazi control. After the preparations had come to a halt in the period September–October 1940, Wagner was seconded to the colonial section of the ministry of propaganda, but he remained on the payroll of the *Antisemitische Aktion* until the end of the war (Mischek, 2002: 85–9).

The colonial section ceased to exist as an independent office when Wagner and his superior Stuckenberg had to join the army in 1942. The defeat of the German army in Africa made its separate existence superfluous. One of the tasks of this office was to evaluate and report on the desirability of the publication of books with colonial themes—manuscripts as well as reprints. A positive recommendation was needed to get the paper allowance for printing. While at this office, Wagner also worked for projects of the colonial office of the Nazi party, which was in

all but its name a government department. Wagner was asked to contribute chapters on Kenya and Uganda for a colonial ethnological handbook on Africa which was edited by Hugo Bernatzik. He also wrote a report on the role of government ethnologists in (future) German colonies. There had always been a strong movement in Germany to get back the colonies which were lost at the treaty of Versailles. It was also hoped that new territories could be added (Mischek, 2002: 90–6, 98–101).

An important source of funding for research and scientific and scholarly publications on colonial topics was the *Reichsforschungsrat*, National Research Council, with its own colonial section. This section supported the preparation of the German version of the book which finally appeared in 1949 as part I of *The Bantu of North Kavirondo*. Wagner was also given six months' official leave from the ministry to complete this work. The colonial section of the *Reichsforschungsrat* also subsidised existing periodicals with colonially relevant themes, among them the *Archiv für Anthropologie*, edited since 1937 by Thurnwald, Westermann and Mühlmann, when it changed its name to *Archiv für Anthropologie, Völkerkunde und Kulturwandel* ('archives for anthropology, ethnology and cultural change'). It had become a journal which was sociologically oriented and which welcomed contributions of a functional character. Here Wagner found a publication outlet for his articles on initiation rites and on the changing family among the Bantu Kavirondo (Wagner, 1939a; 1939b). The article on the changing family also appeared in English (1939c). In 1940 Wagner was asked to join the editorial board. In 1942 Mühlmann also wanted to include themes relating to Eastern Europe, the then current focus of German military expansion. Thurnwald did not agree and he and Westermann resigned. Then the colonial section of the *Reichsforschungsrat* withdrew its financial assistance for the journal. Both sides tried to get Wagner's support. However, when matters had reached that point, Wagner was already on active service in the army and unavailable (Mischek, 2002: 102–9).

In the same year that Wagner became co-editor of the *Archiv*, he achieved his *Habilitation* at Berlin University, where in June Westermann and Thurnwald were his examiners. Apparently there was no longer any need to demonstrate pro-Nazi attitudes for the time that Wagner had been abroad. After his appointment with the *Antisemitische Aktion* he had been admitted to the Nazi party in February 1940. However, apart from submitting a thesis and passing an examination to qualify fully as a university teacher one had also to take part in training courses organised by the Nazi Union of University Teachers. In Wagner's case the evaluation of his participation in such a *Dozentenlager* in February 1941 was a pure formality as he had already been appointed as lecturer at Tübingen University in 1940. Wagner was also offered a post at Berlin, but he preferred Tübingen, probably because he could then also become director of a new kind of ethnological museum at Stuttgart, which was to show the life of German colonials abroad, including the native peoples who were part of their new

environment. The existing ethnological collection of the Linden-Museum was to be included in the new set-up. Wagner travelled every two weeks to Tübingen for his lectures during the winter of 1940–1941, but the ministry soon had to curtail the frequency because of the many other tasks Wagner had to complete (Mischek, 2002: 117–120).

In August 1942 Wagner joined the army. He was sent to southern Russia in preparation for a possible attack on Iraq, but he soon fell ill and returned to Germany for recovery. Next he served in Greece and Italy. In the latter country he was employed by the army as a wireless announcer who had to read messages for the invading American troops in English. He was captured in Italy by these Americans and returned to Germany in July 1945 (Mischek, 2002: 121–3).

How should one judge the Nazi years of Günter Wagner? This question is not merely of interest for us, who look back on his life after half a century, but in the immediate after-war years it was also an eminently practical question as career possibilities during the time of the allied occupation depended on the proof of one's lack of involvement in Nazism. In 1945 Termer, professor of ethnology and director of the Hamburg ethnological museum, refused to employ Wagner at the museum because of his Nazi past. Although at first categorised as a fellow-traveller (*Mitläufer*) by the authorities, Wagner appealed against this decision and got many of his colleagues, among them Evans-Pritchard, Fortes, Forde and Nadel, to write testimonials confirming the impartiality of Wagner's ethnological work before the war. Wagner's argument was that his activities in the ministry of propaganda had been of a similarly harmless nature. Obviously Wagner did not mention anything which could have been detrimental to his case, such as his work for the *Antisemitische Aktion*. As a result, Wagner was no longer considered to have been actively involved in Nazi activities. In the meantime Wagner had tried to earn money, first as a freelance translator. Later he was employed in that capacity by the British occupation forces. In his spare time he prepared the publication of his monograph for the International African Institute (Mischek, 2002: 130–3, 129, 124–7).

Wagner had not even tried to go back to Tübingen and a possible appointment at the University of Berlin was not very attractive, as it was in the Russian sector. In 1947 Radcliffe-Brown, who had been the main referee for the International African Institute recommending the publication of Wagner's book, encouraged him to apply for a lectureship at Oxford, but Godfrey Lienhardt was appointed to that post. Even the application for an honorary lectureship at Kiel in 1949 did not go smoothly; Wagner suspected that Termer tried to prevent his appointment. So perhaps it is not surprising that a job at the Native Affairs Department of South Africa, offered to him in 1949, was more than welcome. He was appointed by van Warmelo, who himself had studied in Hamburg with Thilenius. However, Wagner's professional qualifications also suited the requirements of the department, such as his interest in native law and court procedures and his work on the role

of traditional political institutions under colonial rule (Mischek, 2002: 133–5, 136–42).

Before his untimely death in 1952, caused by a venal infection leading to pneumonia which resulted in heart failure from embolism, Wagner completed a survey of those parts of the Windhoek region which had been reserved for Africans. The report was never published, according to the historian Gewalt, cited by Mischek, perhaps because its results did not fit well with the apartheid ideology (Mischek, 2002: 220–1). Another survey, of the ‘black’ population of the Okahandja District, was published in 1957, edited by his successor Köhler (Wagner, 1957). This research brought him into contact with the Herero, who occupied a native reserve in the Okahandja District. He also visited other Herero reserves and wrote an article on economic aspects of Herero life.² While in Windhoek, Wagner was invited to a professorship at the London School of Economics, which he declined because he wanted to continue his fieldwork among the Herero. He had already started to learn the language. He also did not want to submit his wife, who was often ill, and his daughter, who had just settled down, to yet another removal (Mischek, 2002: 142–5, 232).

There are several interesting conclusions which could be drawn from the account of the life and work of Günter Wagner. Mischek emphasises the point that, contrary to what might be expected, the functionalism which was strongly associated with such declared opponents of Nazism as Malinowski, was accepted without any apparent difficulty in Germany by institutions under Nazi control. Any knowledge which could be useful for a renewal of Germany’s role as a colonial power in Africa seems to have been acceptable. However, there is no indication that functionalism as such was especially favoured. The example of Wagner also refutes the thesis that the Nazi rulers were not at all interested in ethnology and that therefore collaboration of practising ethnologists with the Nazi regime hardly occurred (Mischek, 2002: 238–40).

However, how can we explain that someone who had been deeply influenced by Boas and Malinowski could yet put himself at the disposal of one of the power centres of the Nazi regime, which he earlier professed to detest as much as they did (Mischek, 2002: 227–9, 60)? Mischek sees a similarity in Wagner’s wholesale conversion from a Boasian kind of anthropology to Malinowski’s functionalism and the ease with which he accommodated himself (at least verbally) to the prevailing Nazi discourse. There are not many documents to prove this, but in an article published in 1940 Wagner distances himself from the British ideal of universal global culture for which natives should be educated through an organic development of their own cultural institutions. According to Wagner, racial predispositions as well as environmental conditions of natives were fundamentally different from the predispositions and conditions under which the culture of the

² It was published in two journals under different titles (Wagner, 1952; 1954).

German people had developed. Therefore a common cultural ideal which would be valid for all peoples could not exist, nor could natives be educated to assimilate the specific values of authentic autochthonous German culture (*unsere eigene Völkische Kultur*) (Wagner, 1940b: 265, cited in Mischek, 2002: 177).

However, in the same article Wagner also emphasised that even under Nazi colonial rule, traditional cultures would have to adapt to a European technological civilisation (*europäisch-technische Zivilisation*). Functional ethnology would provide exactly the right kind of method to research such processes of cultural change (*Die funktionalistisch ausgerichtete Völkerkunde ist aber gerade für die Erforschung der Kulturwandelvorgänge methodisch besonders gut vorbereitet*) (Wagner, 1940b: 266, cited in Mischek, 2002: 177).

It is tempting to see a parallel between Wagner's acceptance of the Nazi regime and his willingness to work under a South African government that since 1948 was more than ever committed to racism. In many ways the situation in South Africa was of course perfectly comparable to that in Kenya when Wagner did his fieldwork there in the 1930s. Nevertheless the ideals of British indirect rule in western Kenya were opposed to the principles of Nazi colonial policy, as expounded and approved by Wagner in 1940, in the same way as they were opposed to the principles which formed the foundation of apartheid in South Africa. However, according to Mischek there are no indications that the Ethnological Section of the Department of Native Affairs had much influence on the then emerging apartheid system, nor that Wagner made any concessions in his work for the Department to apartheid ideology (Mischek, 2002: 140–142). Although one might doubt Mischek's assessment of the role of the Ethnological Section with regard to its Afrikaner members, his evaluation of Wagner seems correct and strengthened by the fact that Wagner's work was clearly identified with the social anthropology of English South Africans (Mischek, 2002: 233; cf. Fausto and Neiburg, 2002).

Mischek concludes that Wagner's intellectual biography shows a thoroughgoing adaptation to successive dominant discourses and an inability to maintain his own standpoint. For him Wagner remains a chameleon-like character who even changed his colour literally when he exchanged his civilian outfit for the uniform of an army officer, and later when he appeared in the office of the Department of Native Affairs as 'deeply anglicised' (Mischek, 2002: 236, cf. 233). Wagner's life is for that reason not easy to understand at certain crucial points, especially not when we consider his involvement in the *Antisemitische Aktion*. From a charitable point of view one might concede that he had no choice but to put on a show of outward conformity, which would best be served by working for an organisation that could put an end to any questions about his loyalty to the Nazi cause. However, this decision forced him to help defend plans for a wholesale racial 'cleansing' of German-occupied Europe. He was also drawn into preparations for the colonial exploitation of Africa and its peoples on the basis of a Nazi

racist ideology. If the German colonial project in Africa had succeeded, he would have had to abuse anthropological knowledge to achieve its aims. Moreover, even agreeing for the sake of convenience alone to an immoral ideology would show a profound lack of moral integrity, no matter how well Wagner performed as an anthropologist. For me, this is what is really disconcerting about his case. Wagner was undoubtedly an excellent fieldworker and an able theoretician, but these qualities were not embedded in a morality which is able ultimately to justify his anthropological career.

In conclusion, I must confess that I also feel disappointed at a far more personal level. Over the years I had identified myself with Wagner's Kenyan project. In a way I was continuing where he had left off. At first keeping a critical distance, I later even edited texts collected by him (although written by his African informants and assistants) (de Wolf, 1995). I also felt that I had somehow participated in his fieldwork after gaining access to his wife's diary. I had no reason to doubt that he must have been a very pleasant person to deal with, an impression which is confirmed by all who had known Wagner personally and left documentary evidence of their opinion in this respect (Mischek, 2002: 232). Mischek's very careful and sensitive investigation and evaluation of Wagner's Nazi past came as a shock, rather as if one had discovered an awful truth about the past of one's deceased father.

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