

# 'A Figure of Importance'. Life and Work of Siegfried Frederick Nadel

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Explaining his decision to write-up Nadel's field notes and diaries of his early fieldwork in the Nupe kingdom, anthropologist Peter Loizos underlined the place of Nadel in British anthropology: 'In Nadel's case, we are dealing with a figure of importance. While he has not received the kind of attention in textbooks and histories accorded to Malinowski, Firth, Fortes, Gluckman or Leach, his name must certainly find a place in the second rank of British scholars of the period. In his brief professional life, he produced five substantial books, numerous articles, and took up a prestigious Chair in the newly formed Australian National University. He was remembered by his colleagues as an outstanding mind, and well aware of his pre-eminence.' [1]

When Nadel was being considered for the foundation chair of anthropology at the Australian National University in Canberra, anthropologist Raymond Firth, an advisor to the Interim Council provided 'a little about Nadel personally - his parentage, education, age, character, etc?' [2] Firth provided a short, broad stroke character assessment, concentrating on Nadel's abilities as a teacher and theorist pointing out that his 'origins are Vienna of Jewish (in part at least) parentage'. Firth referred to Nadel's experiences as government anthropologist in the Sudan and his war work, which included holding Civil Affairs posts in Eritrea and Tripolitania, which led, he inferred, to Nadel becoming 'very British ... from being Siegfried he is now Fred.' He stated Nadel was 'relatively easy to get on with, and extremely able. Talks very freely but well with ideas. A very good knowledge [of] sociology and psychology (in which he was trained in Vienna) as well as in Social Anthropology and with a cultivated taste in the arts and an especially good knowledge of music'. He stressed that Nadel 'has an extremely good theoretical equipment which he has been polishing the last two years, and is now ready to put out in systematic form—he has a book well on the way. Very stimulating to students of all grades.' [3] Firth's brief statement underestimated the journey Nadel's life had taken him. [4] As Loizos pointed out, 'if Nadel had achieved a good deal, he had also travelled a long distance intellectually and culturally, to do so. He had matured in a Vienna tense with political conflict between socialists, and conservative nationalists. In 1919, while Nadel was a schoolboy the Austrian Social Democrats had defeated two attempts by local communists at a seizure of power. There had been violence between socialists and conservative nationalists in 1927, and antisemitism was becoming increasingly public, as the National Socialists in Germany became more prominent.' [5] No doubt when news reached

him of the Austrian civil war (the February Uprising) in February 1934, and in July, an attempted Nazi coup resulting in the assassination of the Austrian dictator Engelbert Dollfuss, returning to Vienna was unlikely and added motivation to remain in London pursuing a career in anthropology. [6]

Siegfried Ferdinand Stephan Nadel was born on 24 April 1903 in Lemberg, Galicia, part of the Habsburg monarchy. [7] Both parents were born in Lemberg. His father, a senior railway 'councillor' (lawyer), moved with his wife and their two children to Vienna in 1912. [8] Salat offers no explanation for the move. However, historian Marsha Rozenblit argues that Jews who 'migrated to Vienna from Galicia were ... not typical Galician Jews. In fact, they were much more urban than Galician Jews generally. Whether because of greater poverty, greater mobility, or easier accessibility to the means of transportation, Jews living in the cities of Galicia were much more likely to move to Vienna than any other Jews in the province.' [9]

After attending State Real Gymnasium (Vienna), 1913–1921, Nadel enrolled at the Musik-academie in the University of Vienna; his early ambition was to be a conductor and composer. Music led him to the psychology of music and general psychology, which at that time, was affiliated with philosophy. He was awarded his dissertation (in musicology) in November 1925. That year he was also temporary assistant conductor at the Dusseldorf Opera House. The following year he married Lisbeth Braun (b. 1900), also a musicologist. In 1927 he established his own opera company which toured Czechoslovakia. After spending a brief time in England at a summer school of music he returned to Vienna where he continued to work as a musicologist, developing an interest in African, Javanese and Caucasian music. He worked at the Musikkonservatorium, where he sorted the ethno-musical papers of Rudolf Poch and later catalogued musical instruments for the Wiener Museum für Völkerkunde. He maintained an interest in psychology, and was an active member of the psychological colloquiums of Karl Bühler. During this period he also worked as an Assistant in the Psychological Institute. [10]

In 1930 he submitted his 'probationer treatise' (Habilitation) for admission as an academic lecturer in the philosophical faculty at the University of Vienna. His topic was 'Der Duale Sinn der Musik. Versuch einer musikalischen Typologie' ('The Dual Nature of Music: A Musical Typology'). [11] He wanted to get the *venia legendi* (permission to teach) for Comparative Musical Theory, Psychology of Music and Aesthetics of Music. From the handwritten notes there was disagreement among the committee members (examiners) in regard to the subject Psychology of Music. He was 'reproached for lacking a historically directed approach in his work'. As a result Nadel was asked to withdraw his application. [12] Historian Sander Gilman writes that 'there was a general assumption in Vienna that there was a 'Jewish mind' that transcended conversion or adaptation and that this mind was inherently unoriginal.' [13] This sentiment was an added factor which more than likely influenced the decision of the examiners. [14]

At the time Nadel submitted, Gilman argues, Vienna was probably the most antisemitic city in Central Europe. [15] Legislation had been passed in 1926, restricting the lives of Austrian Jews. After World War I there was a steady movement of Jews from eastern Europe (Galicia and Hungary (Budapest), for example) to Vienna and from there onto Berlin. After 1933, and the rise of Hitler, those who could left for the USA or England. [16] Although Nadel's family

had converted to Catholicism, [17] the restrictions on him and his limited opportunities to pursue his musical vocation, as well as the antisemitism in Vienna, most likely prompted his and Lisbeth's departure for Berlin where he worked on a commissioned biography of the composer and pianist Ferruccio Busoni: [18] *Ferruccio Busoni, 1866–1924*. It was Nadel's last major publication on music. [19]

In Berlin 'the opportunities for studying the musicology of primitive peoples was even greater than in Vienna' but his interest shifted: he soon became 'more and more intrigued with the problems of ethnology.' [20] The ethnomusicologists Kurt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel introduced him to Diedrich Westermann, at that time professor of African languages at Berlin University and a senior member of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (later known as International African Institute) and editor of the journal *Africa*. [21] Within twelve months Nadel, with the support of Westermann, under whom he studied African languages, was awarded a prestigious Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship to attend London School of Economics. [22] Salat writes that he was 'anglicised' in a surprisingly short time. He arrived with 'hardly any better knowledge of English than what he had learned in school, but his capacity of mastering a language within an astonishingly short time proved to be of advantage here as well as during his fieldwork. Very soon... Nadel's first [book] reviews ... appeared in English.' [23]

Nadel registered as a doctoral student in the Department of Anthropology in the London School of Economics, under Charles Seligman and Bronislaw Malinowski. [24] In 1933, he was appointed a Research Fellow of the International Africa Institute, in which capacity he undertook two expeditions to West Africa (Nupe Kingdom in Northern Nigeria) in 1933–34 and 1935–36. He wrote 'a short rather theoretical doctorate with dispatch during nine months of 1935'. [25] *A Black Byzantium: the Kingdom of Nupe in Nigeria*, resulted from this fieldwork, published in 1942. [26] Michael Young, anthropologist and biographer of Malinowski, pointed out to me that Nadel 'was a pioneer of multi-sited ethnography, imposed upon him by the size and complexity of Nupe.' [27]

Why Nadel decided on Nupe is unclear. However, in his introduction to *A Black Byzantium* he explained to the reader that he owes 'special gratitude to Sir Gordon Lethem, Governor of the Leeward Islands, late Lieutenant-Governor of Northern Nigeria, who first drew my attention to the Nupe tribe.' [28] Loizos rightly points out that a senior colonial administrator suggesting a field site to a promising young anthropologist does so because there was an expectation that the anthropologist will act with discretion and secondly, that the administration will learn something from the encounter.' [29] In fact Nadel 'welcomed the opportunity' of applied anthropology 'in providing the knowledge of social structure of native groups upon which a sound and harmonious Native Administration, as envisaged in Indirect Rule, should be built.' [30] Nadel was a strong supporter of anthropology's involvement with colonialism, in order to improve policies in favour of the colonized. In this he was not alone. [31] From its professional beginnings in the 1920s anthropology directly formulated and indirectly implemented colonial policy which was not seriously challenged until the late 1960s. [32]

Indirect rule, however, was not the main focus despite his long term interest in applied anthropology. [33] Both Loizos and Salat point out his analysis of an African state 'was far

ahead of the normal products of functionalist anthropology.’ He showed an understanding of the ‘state as embodiment of class power, and he saw the ritual surrounding monarchy for what it was – an instrument of political mystique, tout court.’ [34] He adds in a review of Salat’s *Reasoning as Enterprise*, that the ‘the most valuable idea Nadel pioneered in British anthropology was an understanding of the crucial role of coercion and domination in state systems...[He] was among the first to see that what he termed ‘ideology’ was a powerful and almost independent force both within complex tribes, and within kingdoms. [35]

Maintaining his interest in applied anthropology he took up the position of Government Anthropologist to the government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. He was to carry out sociological research in the little known area of the Nuba Mountains, to obtain knowledge of the tribes in that area and to advise the Government on matters of ‘Native administration’. The results of this fieldwork, he stated in his application for a senior lectureship at LSE, were ‘embodied’ in *The Nuba: An Anthropological Study of the Hill Tribes of Kordofan* (1947). He enlisted in the British Army in 1941, and was posted to the Army of Occupation in Ethiopia and Eritrea and subsequently held, in the British Military Administration of Eritrea, the appointments of Civil Affairs Officer, Senior Civil Affairs Officer, and Secretary for Native Affairs (with rank of Major).’ On his return from leave he was posted to Tripolitania, ‘H.Q. Staff Officer,... with duties of Secretary for Native Affairs.’ [36]

He was offered the position of senior lecturer at LSE in mid 1945 but was unable to take it up until May the following year, when he was demobbed. [37] In October 1948 he was appointed Reader in Kings College, Durham University, Newcastle. Durham university anthropologist Paul Sillitoe notes that the undergraduate degrees and a postgraduate diploma remained much as designed by Nadel; first appearing in the Calendar for the 1949–1950 academic year, they remained long after he left for Canberra. [38]

In 1948 the newly established Australian National University was casting around for an inaugural professor of anthropology in the Research School of Pacific Studies. Raymond Firth, advising the ANU on appointments in the Research School of Pacific Studies, believed the choice was between Myer Fortes and SF Nadel. He preferred Nadel. In making his pitch for Nadel, Firth stressed his abilities as a teacher: ‘He is extremely stimulating to students and a very good lecturer’. He concluded that he could think ‘of no one better to occupy a new Chair in such an important field that demands high theoretical capacity.’ [39] Nadel accepted the appointment, arriving in Canberra in February 1950. Firth, aware of Nadel’s Africanist experience and his lack of experience in the Pacific region, was sure Nadel would ‘remedy this very rapidly, and his comparative experience in Africa would be of the greatest value.’ Jack Goody wrote that like Fortes, Nadel did not see himself as an Africanist, or as bounded by regional ties, rather he and Fortes ‘regarded themselves as comparative sociologists in the sense that their understanding was not, in their view, limited to one culture [one region] alone. Rather it was human culture itself.’ [40]

Within weeks of his arrival in 1951 an expansive research programme was mapped out. It was a statement on ‘the main research problems with which the Department of Anthropology as I envisage it will be concerned’. [41] It sought to satisfy competing interests, intended to act as ‘basis for planning coordinated research between the Research Schools of Pacific Studies and Social Sciences,’ but dependent upon the ‘interests and number of scholars

available.’ It was a combination of academic research with a practical twist. [42] (Wilson and Young 1996). Nadel did not draw a sharp distinction between sociology and anthropology as far as the subject matter of research. The research projects focussed on the New Guinea highlands and covered diverse subjects: social change in the Pacific islands; the ‘many-sided problem of the adjustment of a primitive population to modern values and ways of life’; ‘a study of the process of assimilation among the recent European immigrants to Australia’; his final project was a study of an Indonesian community, ‘which I should like to carry out myself’. These research projects formed the basis for anthropological research at the ANU throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

Nadel died unexpectedly on 14 January 1956. WR Crocker, a senior Australian diplomat and inaugural chair of International Affairs at the ANU, told his colleague Marcus Oliphant that Nadel ‘a Jew from Central Europe... died suddenly ..., ambitious and manoeuvring to the end. He was, to everyone’s surprise, buried as a Roman Catholic; though non-practicing he had been baptized a Catholic.’ [43]

In his six years at the ANU ‘a score of different research projects had been completed and inaugurated.’ [44] He had succeeded in ‘establishing a Chair and a Department that were known throughout the anthropological world, and in initiating and directing several important and co-ordinated programmes of field research.’ Indeed there were three qualities by which Derek Freeman, who first met Nadel at LSE, would remember him. ‘The scientific spirit which so animated all his activities’; second, ‘his absolute integrity and his constant regard for ethical principle’; and thirdly, ‘the remarkable lambency of mind’. [45] Fortes, Nadel’s long-time colleague and friend (he was guardian of Nadel’s daughter), observed: ‘What impressed everyone who met Nadel... was the fertility of his ideas... his boldness in putting forward his ideas and his quick response to other points of view.’ [46]

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[1] Peter Loizos, ‘Nadel and the Bida journals: a view from a distance,’ in Roger Blench (ed.), S.F. Nadel: the field diaries of an anthropologist in Nigeria 1935–36, Unpublished manuscript, 2006. Anthropologist Adam Kuper treats Nadel as a minor figure (Kuper 1996), while Faris treats him with disregard although he sets him up as a major figure supporting the colonial enterprise and defective in his thought (Faris in Asad, *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* 1973). For a full bibliography of Nadel see Jana Salat, *Reasoning as Enterprise*, Edition Herodot, 1983, 161–166. I dedicate this entry to the memory of Peter Loizos who shared my interest in Nadel, and provided me with his notes and audio tapes. ‘

[2] Keith Hancock to Raymond Firth, 3 March 1949. FIRTH7/7/11.

[3] Firth to Hancock, 9 March 1949. FIRTH7/7/11. Overall Nadel was not seen as a man ‘easy to get along with’. See Geoffrey Gray, ‘The brightest of his generation’: Siegfried Frederick Nadel, foundation professor of anthropology, Australian National University. Unpublished paper 2018.

[4] The following biographical information is drawn mainly from Derek Freeman, Siegfried Frederick Nadel, 1903–1956, *Oceania* 27 (1), 1956, 1–11; Jana Salat, *Reasoning as enterprise: The anthropology of S.F. Nadel*, Edition Herodot, 1983; as well as material in the Archives der Universität

Wien and Nadel's student and staff files at LSE.

[5] Loizos, 'Nadel and the Bida journals', 2006, ii.

[6] Anson Rabinbach, The Austrian Civil War: Harvard and Vienna Conferences. *International Labor and Working Class History*. Number 25, Spring 1984, 98–100.

[7] Lemberg in German, Lwów in Polish, L'viv in modern Ukraine. Omar Bartov, *Erased. Vanishing traces of Jewish Galicia in present-day Ukraine*. Princeton University Press. 2007; Benjamin Lieberman, *Terrible fate: ethnic cleansing in the making of modern Europe*. Ivan R Dee Publisher, 2006; Christoph Mick, *Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv, 1914 - 1947. Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City*. Purdue University Press, 2015.

[8] He had a sister, Else. (b. 1905). His mother was Adele Hirschsprung.

[9] Marsha L. Rozenblit, *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914*, State University of New York Press, 1983, 40.

[10] Nadel to Registrar, 29 April 1945. 'Application for the position of Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the LSE.' Archives LSE. Staff file, S.F. Nadel. See Salat, *Reasoning*, 1983, 125–133 for a discussion on Nadel and the influence of psychology on his practice and theoretical work as an anthropologist.

[11] Archives der Universität Wien.

[12] Salat, *Reasoning*, 25. See also Archives der Universität Wien. The vote was seven for rejection with two abstentions. Only Bühler supported Nadel despite abstaining.

[13] Sander L. Gilman, Smart Jews in Fin-di-siècle Vienna: 'Hybrids' and the anxiety about Jewish superior intelligence—Hofmannsthal and Wittgenstein, *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 3(2), 1996, 46.

[14] See examiners report (Nadel). Archives der Universität Wien.

[15] Gilman, Smart Jews, 46.

[16] See Tibor Frank, *Double Exile: Migrations of Jewish-Hungarian Professionals through Germany to the United States, 1919–1945*. Peter Lang, 2009.

[17] Conversion was a way of hiding Jewishness from the authorities, although this was of little use especially after the annexation of Austria in 1938. Nevertheless, 'The Jew is always recognized' (pers. comm. Konrad Kweit, July 1993). See Tim Bonyhady, *Good Living Street: The Fortunes of My Viennese Family*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011. Nadel's mother and aunt were 'deported' to Minsk in 1941. Victims were executed (by police and Waffen SS) on arrival in a small forest...., Nadel's mother and aunt did not survive. (His sister and brother-in-law emigrated from Vienna to Tel Aviv (Salat)). The fate of his father and other members of his family is unclear. Nadel and Lisbeth returned to Vienna in 1955, a year after the Soviets had moved out, possibly to seek out family members but no record appears to have been kept from this visit.

[18] Freeman 1956, 3.

[19] SF Nadel, *Feruccio Busoni, 1866–1924*. Leipzig: Breitkopf & Härtel, (1931). Nadel wrote music, and sadly his collection of compositions (songs, string quartets and concerto for the piano) was destroyed during the bombing of London in 1940. See also Nadel's application for lecturer in 1946 in

which he mentions the bombing of his house and the destruction of his papers. SF Nadel, Personal file, LSE.

[20] Freeman 1956, 3.

[21] Holger Stoecker, 2008. *Afrikawissenschaften in Berlin von 1919 bis 1945. Zur Geschichte and Topographie eines wissenschaftlichen Netzwerkes*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.; Stoecker, 'The advancement of African Studies in Berlin by the 'Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft', 1920-1945', in Helen Tilley with Robert J. Gordon (eds.), *Ordering Africa. Anthropology, European Imperialism and the politics of knowledge*, Manchester, 2007: 67-94; Benoît de L'Estoile, 'Internationalization and 'scientific nationalism': the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures between the wars', in Helen Tilley with Robert J. Gordon (eds.), *Ordering Africa*. 2007: 95-116. Derek Freeman wrote that Nadel had a remarkable facility and determination for learning languages, which extended to English. Freeman 1956, 3.

[22] See Andre Gingrich, *Alliances and Avoidance: British interactions with German speaking anthropologists, 1933-1953*. In Deborah James, Evelyn Plaise and Christina Toren (eds.), *Culture Wars. Context, Models and Anthropologists Accounts*, Berghahn, 2010; also Peter Kallaway Dierich Westermann and the Ambiguities of Colonial Science in the Inter-War Era, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 45:6, 2017, 871-893, DOI: 10.1080/03086534.2017.1379672

[23] Salat, *Reasoning*, 26.

[24] The following, unless indicated otherwise, is taken from Nadel's application for a senior lecturer in Social Anthropology at LSE. Nadel to Registrar, 29 April 1945. 'Application for the position of Senior Lecturer in Social Anthropology at the LSE.' Archives LSE. Staff file, S.F. Nadel. He gave his name: Siegfried Ferdinand Nadel.

[25] Loizos 2006, ii.

[26] s.l., O. U. P., 1942.

[27] Michael Young, pers. comm. (email) 2015. See also Faris, 1973; Sillitoe 2017, 18-22.

[28] Nadel 1942, xii.

[29] Loizos, 2006, iii.

[30] Quoted Loizos 2006, iv.

[31] In Australia the University of Sydney Professor of Anthropology, AP Elkin, made similar assertions, from the late 1920s on, on the value of anthropology as a palliative able to ameliorate the excesses of colonial rule in a settler dispossessionary nation. He wrote, 'social anthropology can render invaluable service by ascertaining the principles of social cohesion and of social change. The knowledge thus gained is then available for the guidance of the conscientious administrator in controlling and effecting modifications in native life.' (AP Elkin, *Anthropology and the Future of the Australian Aborigines*, *Oceania*, vol. 5(1), 1934, 2). In addition the appointment of trained anthropologists as government anthropologists in Papua and New Guinea, Australian colonial possessions further underlined the value of anthropology (see for example, Geoffrey Gray, *Anthropological expertise in the League of Nations 'C' Mandate Territory of New Guinea*. Philippe Bourmaud, Norig Neceu and Chantal Verdeil (eds.) *Experts and Expertise in the League of Nations Mandates*, Paris (forthcoming)). Despite his assertion 'that the anthropologist

should recommend, give advice, criticize and take a position about the wrongs and rights of a policy', Nadel remained silent over such matters in Australia and colonial nations in the Pacific when he was professor of anthropology at the Australian National University, 1950–1956 .

[32] See various in 'Social responsibilities symposium,' *Current Anthropology*, vol. 9 (5), 1968, 391–435; Gerard Leclerc, *Anthropologie et Colonialisme*, Anthropologie Critique Series, Fayard 1972.

[33] Lord Lugard, who helped formulate the policy of Indirect Rule, wrote the foreword to *A Black Byzantium*. See Sol Tax (ed.), *An Appraisal of anthropology today*, Proceedings of the International Symposium on Anthropology held in New York, 1952. University of Chicago Press, 1953.

[34] Loizos 2006, v; Salat 1983.

[35] Loizos, Review: Reasoning as Enterprise: The Anthropology of S. F. Nadel. by Jana Salat. *Man*, New Series, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Jun., 1985), 374.

[36] See for a critical reading of Nadel, see James C. Faris, Pax Britannica and the Sudan: SF Nadel, in Talal Asad (ed), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Humanity Books, 1973, 153–170.

[37] He enlisted as an Austrian citizen although it is unclear whether he was formally stripped of his citizenship when Austria was under Nazi rule; it is most likely.

[38] Paul Sillitoe, Durham Anthropology: a provincial history of a provisional discipline, *History and Anthropology*, 2017, 18–22. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2017.1279158>

[39] Extract from Firth, 6 July 1949. Australian National University Archives 19/19.

[40] Goody, *The Expansive Moment*, University of Cambridge Press, 1995, 152

[41] SF Nadel, 'Research Projects in Anthropology', February 1951. Copy in author's possession.

[42] Judith Wilson and Michael W Young. Anthropology at the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies: a partial history, *Canberra Anthropology*, vol.19 (2), 1996, 62–91.

[43] WR Crocker, 'The A.N.U.- Ten Years Later' [typescript]. Crocker Papers, Special Collections, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide. MSS 327 C938p S.R.2, Series 9, vol. 1.1. Crocker, clearly antisemitic, explained that if you wanted to understand why antisemitism arises 'Nadel showed why'. His correspondence with others on Nadel is littered with such sentiment.

[44] Freeman 1956, 9.

[45] Freeman 1956, 10.

[46] Meyer Fortes. Siegfried Frederick Nadel 1903–1956. A Memoir, in SF Nadel, *The Theory of Social Structure*, 1957, ix.