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The Border Crosser: Ralf Dahrendorf as a Public Intellectual between Theory and Practice

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Abstract. Dahrendorf was an intellectual whose influence crossed borders in a twofold sense. In one sense, he consistently bridged the boundaries of the academic, political and public spheres. In the other sense, he lived a German-British life, becoming a transnational intellectual. As a professor of sociology and as a journalist, Dahrendorf was influential in forwarding ideas pertinent to a liberal-democratic society. In line with his desire for the greatest intellectual impact possible, Dahrendorf time and again established close links with the political sphere and became a member of the executive branch in Germany and in the European Economic Community – a position which, however, conflicted with his role as an independent intellectual. Nonetheless, the numerous boundaries he bridged, and his various professional experiences and relationships were also beneficial for his position as a public intellectual. They allowed him both an inside view and an understanding of larger contexts.

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, Ralf Dahrendorf published his memoirs, naming them *Über Grenzen*. The metaphor of crossing borders was well-chosen: Not only did Dahrendorf lead a German-British life but his career also oscillated between the academic, the political and the public sphere, thus consistently crossing the borders between theory and practice. Early in his career as a sociologist, he distinguished himself with theories on class divisions, social roles and conflict. As an extremely productive writer, Dahrendorf published frequently for the academic community and beyond. Throughout his life, he produced over 30 monographs, to say nothing of the numerous articles in journals, and he frequently wrote for newspapers such as *Die Zeit*, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, *La Repubblica* or *The Times*, commenting on political and social affairs from a liberal perspective. Both in Germany and in Britain, Dahrendorf served as advisor to political parties. Moreover, he became a politician himself as a member of German parliament (1969-1970), then as commissioner to the European Economic Community (EEC) (1970-1974), and in later years as life peer with a seat in the House of Lords (1993-2009). Acting as academic administrator, he headed the London School of Economics and Political Science (1974-1984) and St Antony's College, Oxford (1987-1997) for ten years each. Among his manifold positions, however, there was one role which Dahrendorf played throughout most of his life: the role of the public intellectual. Starting with his first statements in radio discussions in the British founded radio station *Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk* right after the Second World War,

at the young age of 17, Ralf Dahrendorf attended to the affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany as well as of his adopted country, Britain, as a critical commentator.

The French philosopher and sociologist, Raymond Aron, called himself a “spectateur engagé” (Aron 1985: 55), an engaged or committed spectator, and Ralf Dahrendorf picked up this expression as self-description. Yet, Dahrendorf was much more than just a spectator – however committed – or someone who merely criticized socio-political conditions from a distanced perspective. Ralf Dahrendorf was a *public intellectual* because he consciously and repeatedly engaged in public debates to promote his “ideas as a creative power” (Raphael & Ter-noth 2006), trying to change social conditions. In other words, he wanted to intervene, he wanted to have an impact and he wanted to change society. In doing this, Dahrendorf was always concerned with fundamental matters: The implementation and the protection of liberal democracy, the recognition and exercise of civil rights and – connected to this – increasing life chances for everyone. For him, the goal of political and social equality was never egalitarian in the sense of abolishing distinctions, but he argued for equal opportunities, especially educational opportunities.

In the following section, the term “public intellectual” is understood in a practical sense. According to sociologists Joseph Schumpeter and M. Rainer Lepsius, an intellectual is not defined by character traits but by action: Intellectuals distinguish themselves by criticizing social conditions (Lepsius 1990 [1964]: 277; Schumpeter 2005 [1947]: 237). In order to be heard, intellectual critique has to be expressed in public, including newspapers, journals, books, television, the radio, the internet or public speeches and discussions. Usually, intellectuals are well-educated people; oftentimes they are professors, authors or journalists who have already gained a certain reputation, which is necessary to be able to attract public attention and to be attributed competence. Using the vocabulary of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1986), they need a certain amount of cultural and social capital in order to be accepted as intellectuals (economic capital also helps in order to be able to express an independent opinion).

It has often been argued that intellectuals have to examine the situations which they comment on keeping a critical distance and therefore they should not be involved in political processes or decision making. In contrast to policy-makers or members of parliaments, they should thus be free of interests influencing their analysis or their judgement (Lepsius 1990 [1964]; Bourdieu & Dölling 1991). However, Dahrendorf’s example shows that a rigid categorization of intellectuals is not appropriate. Dahrendorf played many roles through-

out his life, moving from the academic to the public and political spheres, becoming involved in political decision making, acting as political advisor and becoming a member of parliament, while later returning to the academic sphere¹. Hence, he described himself as a “straddler”, who was always trying to bridge the gap between theory and practice (Dahrendorf 1997: vi; Dahrendorf 2009). However, time and again, he had to deal with restrictions when he reached the limits of his self-announced path across proverbial borders².

STRIVING FOR CONFLICT

Dahrendorf, who as a young sociologist wrote the *Homo Sociologicus* (1958), an up until now recognized standard work on role theory, also reflected on his own role as an intellectual, choosing the metaphor of the court jester. The jester, he argued, once circulated among those in power as a critical conscience. Due to his special position outside of social hierarchies, the jester was able to speak the truth – without having to worry whether it was welcome to the ruler or not. In Dahrendorf’s opinion, the function of the medieval jesters was now, in the 20th century, to be inherited by the intellectuals:

[...] intellectuals as court jesters of the modern society are virtually obligated to mistrust the unquestioned, to be astonished by matters of course, to critically put into perspective all kinds of authority, to ask the questions nobody else dares to ask. Certainly, those questions are not comfortable: Do we actually want the German reunification? Does religious education belong in schools? Should abortions be legal? Each question is shocking. [...] But I am convinced that each question has to be asked: Every position, whose contraposition has not at least been debated, is a weak position. And this, to question accepted positions – whether political, moral, educational, religious, or from other fields – and therefore to overthrow them or to strengthen them is the foremost social duty of the jesters of modern society³.

Dahrendorf developed these thoughts in a radio comment broadcasted on February 24, 1963 (Dahrendorf 1966: 175-176), in which he himself appeared in the role of the intellectual.

¹ For a systematization of the roles of the intellectual cfr. Hübinger 2000: 39-40.

² The following is based on my dissertation *Ralf Dahrendorf. Eine Biographie* (2017). Some aspects of this article have also been discussed in: Meifort, Franziska (2015), *Der Nachlass Dahrendorf im Bundesarchiv. Vermächtnis eines öffentlichen Intellektuellen*, in «Jahrbuch zur Liberalismus-Forschung», 27, 301–314.

³ Translation FM.

The 1960s were probably the most active and exciting years of Dahrendorf's career. As a professor of sociology at the University of Tübingen, Dahrendorf conducted research on the influence of class, gender, religion and residence on access to higher education in the German state of Baden-Württemberg in Germany's South. He found out that educational opportunities were highly dependent on provenience and gender. His study caught the attention of Minister President – and later Chancellor – Kurt Georg Kiesinger. The “catholic girl from a rural working-class family” became the epitome of the untended and undeveloped talent or “Begabungsreserve” (talent reservoir) as it was then called (Gerstein 1965; Peisert 1967). While mobilizing talent was mainly considered a benefit for economic development (Halsey 1961; Edding 1963), for Dahrendorf, equal access to education was a citizenship right (Dahrendorf N 1749/803: 160). In the series “Bildung ist Bürgerrecht” (“Education Is a Civil Right”), which appeared 1965 in the weekly *Die Zeit*, the educational researcher Dahrendorf advocated equal access to education for everyone. His articles not only received great attention in public; the political sphere was also receptive to his proposals to reform the educational system. Dahrendorf became an educational advisor of the government of Baden-Württemberg and was commissioned to write a “Hochschulgesamtplan” (1967), a comprehensive higher education plan, for the state. At the same time, he served as vice president of the founding commission of University of Constance, where he became professor in 1966, and he was a member of the *German Bildungsrat*, a national education council. Through newspaper articles, comments on radio and TV and through public speeches, he regularly expressed his views on political and social affairs.

With all this engagement in many fields, one could have almost forgotten that his primary occupation was professor of sociology – had he not at this time written a book, which became his most influential in Germany: *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* (1965, *Society and Democracy in Germany* 1967). The 500-page-monograph was largely based on Dahrendorf's weekly university lectures at Tübingen and had been written in only a few months. Quickly, the book became a bestseller, impressing a whole intellectual generation of university students of the 1960s. The philosopher Jürgen Habermas in later years remarked about the book (Habermas 2009: 13):

it was probably the treatise that had the greatest impact on shaping the political mentality of the population on West Germany's long path to find itself – to a democracy that only in the course of the three to four decades following the

Second World War managed to divest itself of the residues of authoritarian traditions.

Looking back at the post-war decades of the 1950s and 1960s, it is agreed among historians that with *Society and Democracy in Germany*, the discourse on democracy in Germany in the 1960s took on an entirely new tune (Wolfrum 2006: 13; Herbert 2002: 30).

In his sociological theory of democracy, Dahrendorf discussed two things that received great attention in the still young Federal Republic of Germany: the productivity of conflict and the necessity to democratize and liberalize post-war West-German society. In the context of the authoritarian tradition of the German Empire and National Socialism, Dahrendorf suggested that Germans had yet to learn how to deal with social conflicts. In his opinion, social conflicts were not something to be avoided but something desirable. He was convinced that it was not necessarily reasonable or even possible to solve all conflicts, but that West Germans should with and institutionalize them in a civil form. In *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), he had put it in the following way: «freedom in society means above all that we recognise the justice and the creativity of diversity, difference and conflict»⁴.

In *Class and Class Conflict* as well as in *Society and Democracy in Germany*, Dahrendorf pleaded for opening up the ossified social and political structures in West Germany. At the time of the student movement of the mid to late 1960s, his criticism paralleled the sentiments of the younger people. Their perception of a stalemate of German politics and society was taken up by Dahrendorf, opening up ideas about how an open society could actively be shaped.

THE “WUNDERKIND” OF GERMAN SOCIOLOGY

With his urge to protect and strengthen liberal democracy, his embrace of Western values and his fast track career in post-war Germany, Ralf Dahrendorf has been described as a member of the so-called “generation 45” (Moses 1999)⁵. This (male elite) generation is named after the year 1945, which proved to be an initial turning point in their lives. The members of this generation,

⁴ While in Germany *Gesellschaft und Demokratie in Deutschland* is Dahrendorf's most influential book, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959), the revised English version of his habilitation thesis *Soziale Klassen und Klassenkonflikt in der Industriellen Gesellschaft* (1957), has the status of a “modern sociological classic” (Crouch 2011: 94) in English-speaking academia.

⁵ The journalist Joachim Kaiser was probably the first to use the term “forty-fivers” in a radio comment, (Kaiser 1966 [1962]).

roughly born in the years 1926 to 1932, were educated in Nazi-Germany. Initially convinced of Nazi ideology they were disaffected when they had to fight in the last phase of Second World War as young *Wehrmacht* soldiers or teenage *Flakhelfer* (air force assistants). They were old enough to fully experience Nazi fascism and the horror of war, but young enough in 1945 to see the German defeat as an opportunity, as a liberation. Due to their young age, they had no or little responsibility in the “Third Reich,” were thus exonerated in denazification, and later often profited from Allied sponsorship in the form of scholarships, like Fulbright grants to study at US universities. The “45ers” were impressed by the Western way of life, its political culture, its modernity and its liberal society. Hence, they were eager to implement democracy and liberalism in their formerly fascist home country. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the young men quickly climbed the ladder, advancing into leading positions in journalism, politics and academia, thus determining the public, the political and the academic sphere of West Germany for an exceptionally long period of time⁶.

Looking at Dahrendorf’s quick ascension, his early educational experiences in Britain and the United States as well as his commitment towards a democratic and liberal German society, he might well be seen as a typical “45er.” His experience in Nazi-Germany was different from many of his contemporaries nonetheless. Ralf Dahrendorf was the son of Gustav Dahrendorf, who had been a social democratic member of the German parliament, the *Reichstag*, until Hitler came to power in 1933. At home, political discussions were common at the dinner table. In his memoirs, Ralf Dahrendorf stressed the importance of his father as a role model and a mentor (Dahrendorf, BArch N 1749/794: 9).

Social Democrat Gustav Dahrendorf was engaged in the resistance against National Socialism. In 1944, he was arrested and imprisoned for his involvement in the plot against Adolf Hitler in which Claus von Stauffenberg attempted to assassinate the *Führer* on July 20, 1944. Only a few weeks later, Ralf Dahrendorf was also arrested and shut in a Gestapo prison camp because of his involvement in a schoolboys’ anti-Nazi resistance movement, which had produced pamphlets against Hitler. In Winter 1944-45, 15-year-old Ralf Dahrendorf spent four weeks in this camp, which was similar to a concentration camp. Here, he was exposed to physical violence by the camp commandant and forced to witness the execution of a Soviet prisoner of war, who was hanged for stealing half a pound of butter (Grosse 1996; Meifort 2017: 31-35). Certainly, those weeks left a strong imprint on his life. In

later years, Dahrendorf drew on this initial experience to explain why he had such a strong desire for liberty (Dahrendorf 1975: 15-16; Dahrendorf 2002: 71). While Dahrendorf seems to have condensed a longer process of personal development and formation of character into a single experience (Kocka 2009), his urge to defend and protect the fragile asset of liberty, liberal democracy as well as the rule of law whenever he saw them to be threatened might have its seeds in this experience. As his friend, the American historian Fritz Stern, put it: «it was the denial of freedom that made him a passionate defender of freedom» (Stern 2009: 15).

After the defeat of the “Third Reich” in 1945, Ralf Dahrendorf absorbed the democratic culture brought to Germany by the British and American occupational forces. Through his father, he came in touch with army officials like Noel Annan, Robert Birley and Hugh Carleton Greene who sponsored the talented young man in subsequent years. Dahrendorf was able to visit a British re-education camp in Wilton Park in 1948. The 19-year-old was deeply impressed by the way in which discussions were held and people were able to express diverging opinions: “Like a sponge I absorbed the talks, debates and conversations at Wilton Park,” Dahrendorf wrote in later years (Dahrendorf, BArch, N 1749/803: 98). The experience made him regard British discussion culture as a model for Germany.

After finishing his studies of Philosophy and Classical Philology in Hamburg with a doctorate in 1952, Dahrendorf went on to the London School of Economics and Political Science where he studied sociology. He attended the lectures of the philosopher Karl Popper, who impressed him with his method of empirical falsification and his idea of an open society (Popper 1945). On his return to Germany in 1954, Dahrendorf first worked for the remigrants Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno at the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt and then at Saarbrücken University. In 1958-59, he spent an academic year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University in the USA, where he became friends with the Fritz Stern. Due to his brilliant and sometimes quite provocative essays – challenging leading senior scholars like Talcott Parsons (e.g. Dahrendorf 1958b) – he was seen at that time as the “Wunderkind” of German Sociology (Kruse 2012: 261).

Jürgen Habermas, who was like Dahrendorf born in 1929, confessed at Dahrendorf’s 80th birthday how much his peer had impressed him in the 1950s. At 28, Dahrendorf had already finished his second book, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, and was thus qualified as professor; he had not only earned a German doctorate but also a PhD from the London School

⁶ For the debate about the impact of this generation cf. Hodenberg 2002; Herbert 2003; Nolte 2008; Bavaj 2011; critical: Forner 2014.

of Economics and he was well-familiar with British and American Sociology – while Habermas had yet to discover Anglo-American sociologists like Talcott Parsons. Habermas remembered his first encounter with Dahrendorf in 1955 (Habermas 2009: 11-12):

This brilliant mind who opted for clarity by constructing poignant ideal types rather than for the art of hermeneutics, quickly caught the eye – no less by his powerful eloquence than by his uncompromising demeanor, one that already exercised authority. What made Dahrendorf stand out from among his peers was the avant-garde self-confidence with which he set out to dispense with the old and usher in the new.

THE INTELLECTUAL AS POLITICIAN

To dispense with the old and to usher in the new was something that Dahrendorf strove for, not only in German Sociology in the 1950s, but also ten years later, when he entered German politics. The consensus democracy of the Grand Coalition formed by the conservative CDU/CSU and the social democratic SPD under Chancellor Kurt Georg Kiesinger (1966-1969) was intolerable for him. Without a noteworthy opposition, the Grand Coalition in his eyes represented a political stand still while social reforms were urgently necessary. Thus, Dahrendorf decided to take a big step and changed his position from commenting spectator to that of an active politician when he became a member of the German Free Democrats (FDP) in 1967 in order to first run for the Baden-Württemberg state parliament and then for *Deutsche Bundestag*, the German Federal Parliament.

He explained his decision in a letter sent to his close friend Fritz Stern:

To put it briefly, my decision might be explained like this: I want to put the possibilities of German parliamentarianism, if not of German democracy, to the test before I decide to leave Germany for good. It is a decision for experiment through action instead of experiment through waiting and distance⁷.

As he had learned from his LSE teacher Karl Popper, Dahrendorf opted for trial and error in order to change German politics. With his heart and soul, he entered the fray of an intense election campaign in which he lived up to his own demand for discussion. True to his conviction about the productivity of conflict and the belief that every position had to stand the test of being put

into question, he sought debates with competing candidates, ordinary people, and representatives of the student movement. A spectacular example is the discussion he had with the famous student leader Rudi Dutschke in Freiburg in January 1968, sitting on a car roof outside the town hall where the Free Democratic Party convention took place.

A photo of this discussion (Fritz Reiss, dpa) has become an iconic picture in the collective memory of the Federal Republic of Germany. Its message is that Dahrendorf did not shy away from arguing with Rudi Dutschke, who was by many seen as a dangerous Marxist troublemaker and well-known for his endless and complicated but nevertheless impressive speeches. What is more, Dahrendorf not only argued with him – due to his resolute democratic self-confidence, his rhetorical talent and his belief in the power of the better argument, he was even able to defeat Dutschke in the debate. The battle between the radical student leader who wanted revolution outside of parliament and the newly bred politician who wanted to use the existing institutions in order to reform society was a win for Dahrendorf.

Since the party convention in Freiburg, Dahrendorf was regarded as the shooting star of the FDP. Expectations were high: Soon he was considered not only the intellectual mastermind but the future leader of the party (Schwarz 1968). And in fact, Dahrendorf was more than just a prominent public face for the FDP. With his ideas and his charismatic appearance, he had a major impact on the renewal of the Free Democrats and also on the formation of the “social-liberal” coalition of SPD and FDP, which in 1969 ended the hegemony of conservative Christian Democrats in West Germany for the first time since 1949. The election of Social Democrat Willy Brandt, who had been a member of the resistance against National Socialism, as chancellor in 1969 was regarded as a fundamental change in German politics. When the government was formed, Dahrendorf became parliamentary state secretary to the foreign minister under FDP party chairman and vice-chancellor Walter Scheel.

However, Dahrendorf did not stay long in this position. His own expectations of his possibilities in politics, as well as the expectations others had of him, were bound to fail. As parliamentary secretary at the Federal Foreign Office, he was responsible for international culture policy as well as for keeping contact between Scheel and the FDP group in parliament. The former was not quite what Dahrendorf had had in mind when he entered politics in order to fundamentally change society. The latter proved to be a challenge for the political newcomer who had little party affiliation and few friends among the predominantly national liberal MPs of the

⁷ Dahrendorf, Ralf to Stern, Fritz, Oct. 24, 1967, in: BArch N 1749/45, translation FM.

FDP. Moreover, he time and again attracted the attention of the public with political statements that were not in tune with the party line (Meifort 2017: 186-190).

Considering his former role, Dahrendorf's behavior does not seem surprising. As a public intellectual, he had acted as a soloist. He was used to generating public attention by stating his personal opinion in pointed remarks, strategically using opposition as a tool to kindle debate. Now, he was rather ill at ease with his role as a party politician and not willing or even able to subordinate his own opinion to political tactics and to toe the party line. Moreover, as a political candidate during an election campaign, it had been possible for Dahrendorf to demand extensive social and political reforms without having to execute them himself. When he became a member of the German government, however, Dahrendorf became responsible for the implementation of his political ideas. The impatient high-speed thinker was soon weary of the long bureaucratic processes which are part of politics – the slow drilling through thick boards, as Max Weber put it. After only nine months in office, he seized the chance to leave the German government and go to Brussels as commissioner to the European Economic Community. For four years, from 1970 to 1974, Dahrendorf served first as trade commissioner and then as commissioner for education.

But even in the exalted position of an EEC commissioner, Ralf Dahrendorf could not help playing the role of the court jester. In 1971, he published two articles in the weekly *Die Zeit* under the pen name of "Wieland Europa." In these articles, he did what intellectuals do: he criticized and questioned the political situation. His polemic gave air to his frustration of practical politics. He called the EEC "symptomatically small-minded," the European Council of Ministers "growingly inefficient," and the European Parliament a "farce" (Dahrendorf 1971b). But his bold criticism of the increasing bureaucracy and the missing democratic legitimation of the European institutions soon backfired on him, as he was seen as someone who was fouling his own nest. For a time, it seemed like the articles had made him become a persona non grata at the commission and he almost had to resign. After Britain joined the EEC in 1973, he had to give up the external relations and foreign trade portfolio, and was moved to the less influential department of research, science and education.

This episode shows that Dahrendorf was conflicted about his roles as public intellectual and as politician. When he decided to become a politician in 1967, Dahrendorf had consciously accepted this role conflict when claiming "experiment through action instead of experiment through waiting and distance" – as he had written

to Fritz Stern. However, it seems to have been precisely this change of roles and the loss of autonomy that it entailed which made him forfeit much of his ability to shape intellectual debates.

SITTING ON THE FENCE

In 1974, Dahrendorf ended the experiment of active politics and sought greater distance to it. He accepted the offer to become director of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (Meifort 2014; Dahrendorf 1995). As head of this renowned university, he was able to do what had been his concern ever since the 1960s, when he acted as university professor and political advisor: to connect the academic, the political and the public sphere in a fruitful way. Already before he was officially appointed as director, Dahrendorf wrote to the president of the LSE Society, Richard J. Hacon: "[...] we should organise many more contacts with the City, Fleet Street and Whitehall, and thus correct a certain inward lookingness of the School."⁸ On a frequent basis, Dahrendorf invited scholars, politicians, journalists and business representatives to take part in discussions at the so called "director's dinners" at the LSE.

At the same time, Dahrendorf conquered the position of a public intellectual in Britain, even if it was lower key than it had been in Germany. In 1974, he gave the renowned Reith Lectures on the BBC on the topic "The New Liberty," followed by over one million listeners. In these lectures, he stressed individual rights and advocated an "improving society" instead of an "expanding society" (Dahrendorf 1975: 28). This phrase advanced the thesis of *Society and Democracy in Germany*, in which he had argued in 1965 that legal conditions of a democratic society had to be followed by the actual liberalization of society. Alluding to his former LSE teacher T.H. Marshall, Dahrendorf saw citizenship not as a status but as a never finalized process in a permanently changing society. *Life Chances*, the title of his book published in 1979, had to be negotiated and disputed over and over again.

Apart from that, Dahrendorf published in many newspapers and magazines in Germany and Britain on different topics. Most strikingly, as a native German, he took on the role of an expert about British society. In numerous articles he commented on the causes for the "British disease," i.e. the reasons for the declining British economy in the 1970s. At that time, Britain was regarded as the "sick man of Europe". In lectures like "Why Brit-

⁸ Dahrendorf, Ralf to Hacon, Richard J., Jun. 5, 1974, in: BArch N1749/53.

ain failed” (Fb 1981), Dahrendorf analyzed the causes of economic stagnation and recurring strikes. On the other hand, with articles under the headlines of “Reply to the Britain Bashers” or “Why I like it here” (Dahrendorf 1976) he became an advocate for his adopted home country.

In 1983, Dahrendorf analyzed the state of British society in a BBC TV series called “Dahrendorf On Britain,” where again, he was not only an analyst of problems but also a defender of British lifestyle. However, the *Daily Telegraph* asked whether a German, who had only been in the country since 1974, was at all qualified to express his opinion on the state of Britain (Clayton 1983). But the view of the German as a “friendly outsider” (Hackett 1983) was also welcomed: “Perhaps it needs a foreigner’s eye to remind us that Britain despite her ills, is still a nice place. This view of his actually left me with a feeling of shame,” wrote a *Daily Express* journalist (Rees 1983). A comment by the *Guardian* stresses how unusual the acceptance of the analysis of a German was: “how many other Germans, or even foreigners, could have got away with it?” (Vat 1983). Dahrendorf got away with it because he comforted the British soul at a time when many Britons felt economically inferior to other countries, especially to Germany. Moreover, the German expat had assimilated in Britain by this time: A portrait of Dahrendorf said about him: “he is as English as buttered crumpets at four o’clock” (Caborn 1983).

At the same time, Dahrendorf preserved for himself a certain distance as a “German Briton” (Dahrendorf 1997: vi), as a “friendly outsider.” Perhaps the British notion of intellectuals being un-British or alien (Collini 2006: 126) made it easier for Dahrendorf to be an intellectual as a foreigner. In Germany, on the other hand, his interventions came from the British perspective – a bird’s eye view of German affairs so to speak – allowing him a wider angle of view. With his transnational perspective, Dahrendorf also served as a cultural broker between Germany and Britain, explaining Britain to the Germans in newspaper articles and essays (Dahrendorf 1979b; Dahrendorf 1979c). Thus, for both countries, it can be argued that Dahrendorf spoke from a position of an intellectual in exile, a position that has been called a “magnifying glass” (Burschel & Gallus & Völkel 2011: 7-8) for the view of the intellectual.

When Dahrendorf became warden of St Antony’s College, Oxford, in 1986, another perspective of Europe was added to his thinking: He started his engagement with Central and Eastern European dissidents. Dahrendorf chaired the *Central and East European Publishing Project*, initiated by Timothy Garton Ash, whose goal it was to create a “common market of the mind” (Garton Ash 1995: 10) between East and West by supporting

Central and East European publishers and journals and encouraging translations.

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989-90, Dahrendorf’s conceptions of a liberal civil society were closely followed in Central and Eastern Europe (Dahrendorf 1988; Dahrendorf 1990). While his analyses of society became increasingly popular and well-received in many European countries, including Italy and Spain, Dahrendorf encountered difficulties in finding acceptance in the German academic sphere, which he had left for too long. His book *Der moderne soziale Konflikt* (1992)⁹ fell rather flat in Germany, and the missing acknowledgement of the scientific community was not “entirely painless” (Dahrendorf BArch, N 1749/804: 76) for him.

Looking at Germany’s reunification, the attitude of the liberal Dahrendorf was more relaxed than that of left wing intellectuals such as Jürgen Habermas or Günter Grass, who were afraid of a “Deutsch Mark patriotism” (Habermas 1990; Grass 1990) and of West-Germany overpowering the GDR. For Dahrendorf, the Federal Republic, with its parliamentary democracy, liberalization and social market economy, was a “success story” (Dahrendorf 1990).

However strong Dahrendorf’s engagement with and interest in Europe was, characterizing him as a “European intellectual” (Hübinger 2012) seems to be misleading. Although he saw the collaboration of the European Union as a necessity of modern policy making and a warrantor of peace in Europe, he always stressed the importance of the national state that secured democracy, civil rights and economic order. In this sense, he was a critic of rash attempts at transferring national responsibilities to the European Union and an opponent of an increasingly dominant European Unification (Dahrendorf 2003; Weisensee 2005). What is more, it was not Europe but the West which was important as a cultural frame of reference. Ever since his youth, Dahrendorf had regarded both Britain and the United States as countries of democracy and liberty, and he said about himself: «I will always be a Westerner before I am a European» (Dahrendorf 2004: 325).

“The West” became a key term for Dahrendorf, particularly after the Islamist terrorist attacks of 9/11. In reaction to the dissent between the USA and some European countries over the war in Iraq, he stressed the unity of Europe and America as the frame of liberalism in order to prevent a division of the West. In an article written together with Timothy Garton Ash, he criticized attempts to establish the European Union as a counter-pole to the

⁹ The German publication *Der Moderne Soziale Konflikt* (1992), is a revised version of *The Modern Social Conflict* (1988) and was translated in several languages.

United States (Dahrendorf & Garton Ash 2003). He took a stance for a common policy of Europe and the USA and in the debates of the House of Lords, of which he had been a member since 1993, he was a supporter of the war on Iraq (House of Lords Debate 2003: 296-297).

For the German-British Lord, who had obtained British citizenship alongside his German one in 1988, England – and that meant especially London – had become a second home, while he stayed active as a public intellectual in Germany. Moreover, on the cross benches of the House of Lords, Dahrendorf had found a position which guaranteed him a maximum of political independence while at the same time being able to shape politics. This independence was extremely important for him as remained a soloist as an intellectual; he did not allow himself to be assigned to a particular group or school.

Dahrendorf was concerned with bringing together the academic, the political and the public spheres, trying to make academic insights applicable for politics. His desire to have political impact explains his many career changes, as he was looking for positions that allowed him to maximize his influence. In the 1960s, Dahrendorf was successful in transferring the results of his empirical research on educational opportunities into political programs. At the heyday of political and social planning, the professor of sociology and political advisor was seen as an expert on society. When Dahrendorf joined the FDP in 1967, he carried the hopes of a liberal renewal of the party. However, those hopes soon gave way to mutual disappointment. Dahrendorf was frustrated by the limited room for maneuver in practical politics and his supporters were disappointed by him leaving German politics much sooner than expected. Leading academic institutions in Britain, on the other hand, proved to be more suitable for him. Here, Dahrendorf was able to interact with representatives of the academic, the political and the public spheres, combining his diverse interests. Consequently, his posts as director of LSE and as warden of St Antony's were the longest engagements in his career, as he served ten years in each position. Though he stayed in demand as a public intellectual and publicist in Germany, his publications like *The Modern Social Conflict* were denied the recognition of German academia.

Already in 1974, the *London Times* journalist Peter Hennessy had pointed out the dilemma that accompanied this “straddler” between theory and practice:

Like all fliers, he inspires resentment among those who can scarcely shine in a single career. His record of leaping from one job to the next adds substance to those who suspect that in Ralf Dahrendorf, pretension outruns performance. His political opponents sneer at him as a lightweight, an

academic manqué, while his academic detractors put him down as an intellectual poseur (Hennessy 1974).

However, it might have been exactly his position on the proverbial fence that made him an influential public intellectual. While the roles of the public intellectual and the politician conflicted with each other, Dahrendorf's experiences in the fields of academia, politics and media, as well as his position as a German-Briton, enabled him to have detailed knowledge and an overview of social and political development at the same time. Knowing full well that there is no ideal condition of the intellectual, Dahrendorf was always looking for the balance between the antipodes of academia and politics. Neither in Britain nor in Germany did he let himself be taken in by a political party. Ralf Dahrendorf was a liberal without an ideology, but with the conviction to protect and to broaden the liberty and the life chances of the individual in a liberal democracy.

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