

# H-Diplo ESSAY 210

Essay Series on Learning the Scholar's Craft: Reflections of Historians and International Relations Scholars

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*Sorry: Did I Crack A Glass Ceiling?*

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Chance seems to have played a very big part in the accounts of fellow historians who have been writing reflective pieces for H-Diplo on their formative years. So it has been for me. But I am aware that chance and serendipity are less likely to shape the careers of younger scholars today, for the formal and informal demands upon young scholars are much more relentless. A while ago, I gave an informal talk to a group of young female scholars, post docs and lecturers in Humanities and Social Scientists based at ETH Zurich. They were genuinely shocked that I had not paid more systematic attention to my career trajectory and ambitions. It made me rather embarrassed, but also very grateful that the cards had fallen in the unplanned way they did.

So here goes. I read Modern History at the University of Oxford in the days when two languages (one being Latin) were required, and when Modern History ended decisively in 1939. The course was essentially shaped around English (yes, not British,) History; on the study of some of the 'greats' from the past—in my case, the Venerable Bede (in Latin); Alexis de Tocqueville (in French); Edward Gibbon and Thomas Babington Macaulay (in English, of course); and a variety of narrative papers and document-based work. Thinking on your feet when under pressure was all part of the training—the Finals exam simply consisted of ten three-hour papers over five days—with no continuous assessment during the course. Learning to skate on thin ice was therefore all part of what was to be a very useful training.

The tutor who made the most impression on me was Tony Nicholls, the German and European specialist based at St Antony's College.<sup>1</sup> He gave history undergraduates tutorials on nineteenth and twentieth-century European History (eight, weekly tutorials were done in 'pairs' of two students, one of whom would read an essay while the other would then take it to pieces in front of the tutor). Tony Nicholls was gracious enough to at least appear to take my incoherent ideas more or less seriously. I was also frustrated that Modern History stopped so suddenly in 1939, and my curiosity about 'what happened next' was whetted by this course. After Finals, I was asked by one of my other tutors to become his research assistant, but my College tutor strongly advised me against this, sternly arguing that women should get a professional qualification rather than simply be a gopher for someone else's research. Note how the culture was at once very hands-off and sink-or-swim, but also very intensely supervised. I also got the strong impression that she had other, unspoken reasons for advising me in this way.

So last-minute entry into teacher-training it was. This was a different world—sociology, psychology, pedagogic training, and teaching practice were the focus of the course, and the subject-specific issues were not dealt with. Teaching led me into five happy years working in an English College of Further Education—which offered A Level (18 +), and lower level academic subjects, as well as the full range of practical training courses—from plumbing to catering, as well as pre-Art School courses.

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<sup>1</sup> The core text of his for students in the 1970s was Anthony James Nicholls, *Weimar and the Rise of Hitler* (London : Macmillan; New York : St Martin's Press, 1968). Sadly, Tony Nicholls, a stalwart, well-loved, and energetic member of St Antony's College, died in February 2020.

As a historian I still knew nothing really, but it was assumed that my degree would qualify me to teach anything at all—and so the range of my teaching spanned general studies for art students (as you ask, I designed a course on art and society during the Russian Revolution); music; and general studies for technical apprentices (everything from the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, to sex education). I taught A Level Twentieth Century History, which I was also asked to teach to 6th formers in the local comprehensive school; and ran Workers Educational classes for local adults. It was all wonderful; amongst other things, it left me with little patience for future University colleagues who could not lecture—crowd control was essential in a college of further education environment.

I was also a tutor in a second level course on the ‘Renaissance and Reformation’ with the newly created Open University, which was an extraordinary experience—with brilliantly written ‘texts,’ tutor-marked, and computer-marked assignments. The first taste of how technology could work with adult education was truly invigorating.

Then a pause.

After five years devoted to very contented child rearing, curiosity took over again. In 1981 I went as a mature student to the University of Reading to do a one-year MA, part-time over two years, in a Department of Politics and International Relations. What an imaginative opportunity Reading University gave local people with provision like this. I was to learn ‘European Studies’ which somehow tucked Political Science, History, and Comparative Education into the curriculum. I joined other students from the UK and, increasingly, across Europe and globally, learning about Europe and the world after the Second World War—at last - up to the present day. Being a mature student was a huge advantage, on reflection. Time management becomes essential, not just a luxury for nerdy students. And when I was done, I got a scholarship, from the British Social Science Research Council as it was then called, to do a doctorate full-time.

The Department of Politics and IR at Reading left its doctoral students to get on with their independent work: to choose a topic, to learn how to work in archives, to write using documents honestly and clearly, to manage their time, and, most important, to think about historical arguments. To be honest, given my domestic constraints I had to work on British foreign policy. I soon discovered that the four-power postwar Councils of Foreign Ministers (held between 1945 and December 1947) had barely been examined, so my topic, and with it the UK Public Record Office, now called the National Archives, found me. The half-decade from 1945 is possibly the most significant peacetime half-decade of the twentieth century, and so it was possible to combine detail with an examination of the big questions about the beginning of the Cold War, and about the ending of the British empire.

The mid 1980s heralded a shift away from a strictly bipolar view of the Cold War world, in part because of the growing self-confidence of the then European Community (EC). So, an argument that placed Britain, which was then in the EC, at the centre of postwar decision-making in the creation of a divided Germany, and the ‘re-set’ of the international system after 1945, was apposite and was really exciting to think about. It also made me realise how what we may think are our objective observations are so often actually framed and reflected back by the larger world around us. My supervisor, Professor Avi Shlaim, was a specialist on the Berlin Blockade of 1948-1949, but had started to work on the Middle East, so I had specialist supervision, but without the need to find a topic that did not trip over the toes of the supervisor.<sup>2</sup>

In the doctoral viva—the external was the now very distinguished Professor Chris Hill—I was challenged openly for the first time about whether I was actually a social scientist or an international historian.<sup>3</sup> ‘Good question,’ as I was learning to say. Professor Hill had himself written an historical doctorate but was now in the prestigious Department of International

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<sup>2</sup> Avi Shlaim, *The United States and the Berlin Blockade, 1948-1949: A Study in Crisis Decision-Making* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983); Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> The book based upon the doctorate is, Anne Deighton, *The Impossible Peace: Britain, the Division of Germany and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

Relations at the LSE, so the question clearly had more than routine viva-question interest.<sup>4</sup> In Britain, I think this entwined relationship between International History and International Relations and Government has dogged every major and relevant University Department.

Reading University took me on the staff of the Politics/IR Department in 1987, as I was completing the doctorate, and my teaching was to bright undergraduates who were often taking exciting joint courses, combining International Relations with Politics, or other disciplines, or languages. My core teaching was a qualitative course that I was allowed to design, called 'Political Integration in Western Europe since 1945.' It was hugely popular because the end of the Cold War was taking place before our eyes in the late 1980s, and there seemed to be everything to play for in the future for teachers and students alike. I taught a similar course to graduate students who were doing the very same course I had taken a few years earlier.

In 1991 I was asked to apply for a post, and moved to Oxford University, becoming a Senior Research Fellow (SRF) in St Antony's College, attached once again to a Department of Politics and International Relations. No one actually told me that I did not have to teach when a SRF, so I found myself teaching a great deal. I certainly was not stern enough about protecting my time, mostly due to the anxiety of the fixed term appointment. It is also true that women usually have a very tough time carving out their own niches in universities. The core course for the highly competitive two-year MPhil in International Relations—history and lots of theory - was as taxing for me as it was for some of the new students. This was balanced by a dream course for second year MPhil graduate students in 'Postwar European International History,' which I helped design, and then taught every year for more than ten years with Professors Tony Nicholls (my undergraduate tutor) and Jonathan Wright, another senior and hugely experienced historian of Germany and of international history in Oxford.

When I was promoted from a SRF to a Lecturer at Oxford, that is, back to the status I had had in Reading, and also moved on to Wolfson College, I thought I had the best job in the Department. I was teaching seriously clever graduate students on the MPhils in IR and European Politics, and at doctoral level filling the chronological and some of the regional gaps left by my own undergraduate degree.

Intellectually, I was faced with a dilemma of whether to continue the fine-grained work I had done on British foreign policy after World War Two, perhaps now taking on a study of Britain and NATO. (I had a hunch that the increasingly unwell Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin was less keen on NATO in 1949 than were influential senior members of his Foreign Office staff). But Professor Lawrence Kaplan, whose work had always been sensitive to the European perspective, had largely mastered the area.<sup>5</sup> But I also wanted to look at security issues, and was attracted to a sub-field that was re-inventing itself and expanding dramatically after the Cold War, and was appealing for those in many disciplines: European Security.

So, possibly foolishly and under-focused, I worked in both areas. This first took me back to pure diplomatic history; bilateral relations; historical developments relating to Britain in the European Community; European détente; Sir Isaiah Berlin as a don and diplomat (he founded Wolfson College); and of course, British foreign policy in the first decade after World War Two.<sup>6</sup> There was an enormous amount of good historical writing to think about and engage with—including work by Zara

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Hill, *Cabinet Decisions on Foreign Policy: The British Experience, October 1938-June 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> See, *inter alia*, Lawrence S. Kaplan, *The United States and NATO: The Formative Years* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1984).

<sup>6</sup> See Anne Deighton, "The Cold War in Europe, 1945-1947," in Ngairé Woods, ed., *Explaining International Relations since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Deighton, "Britain & Germany, 1945-1972," in Klaus Larres, ed., *Uneasy Allies: British-German Relations & European Integration since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Deighton, "British Foreign Policy-Making: the Macmillan Years," in Wolfram Kaiser and Gillian Staerck, eds., *British Foreign Policy, 1955-64: Contracting Options* (London: Macmillan, 2000); Deighton, ed., *Building Postwar Europe: National Decision-Makers and European Institutions, 1948-1963* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995, 2003); Deighton, "Ostpolitik or Westpolitik?: British foreign policy, 1968-1975," *International Affairs* 74:4 (October 1998): 893-901; Deighton, "The Remaking of Europe: 1945-1989," in Michael Howard and Wm. Roger Louis,

Steiner, Tony Judt, Mark Mazower, John Lewis Gaddis, Mel Leffler, Arne Westad.<sup>7</sup> Collective work on the Leffler/Westad volume on the Early Cold War was stimulating but terrifying, as, in the Truman Library, each chapter author was lined up in turn, metaphorically back-to-the-wall of (male) historians, as they gave our chapter contributions the most rigorous peer review one could think of.<sup>8</sup>

But, now intrigued by more contemporary issues, I also began to write, first on the history of Western European Union (WEU); then on NATO responses to 9/11; the foundations of European Security policies; UK policies towards the neutral states; human rights and the Council of Europe in the Cold War; multi-lateralism and security policy. A mixed bag, indeed, reflecting the diversity of fields in European Studies and contemporary European history, while I was often trying to weave the two areas together.<sup>9</sup>

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eds., *Oxford History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998): 190-205; Deighton, ed. With Elisabeth du Reau, Robert Frank, *Dynamiques européennes: nouvel espace, nouveaux acteurs, 1969-1981* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2002); Deighton, "Minds not Hearts: British Policy and West German rearmament," in Christian Haase, ed., *Debating Foreign Affairs* (Berlin: Philo, 2003); Deighton, "The Second Application for Membership of the European Communities," in Oliver Daddow, ed., *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's Second Application to Join the EEC* (London: Frank Cass, 2002); Deighton "Our Scandinavian Allies: Britain, Norway and the Council of Europe," in Helge Pharo and Patrick Salmon, eds., *Britain and Norway: Special Relationships* (Oslo: Oslo University Press, 2012); Deighton "Great Britain and the Vienna Summit of 1961," in Gunter Bischof, Stefan Karner, Barbara Stelzl-Marx, eds., *The Vienna Summit of 1961 and its Importance in International History* Harvard Cold War Studies Book Series (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014), German edition: *Der Wiener Gipfel 1961 Kennedy-Chruschtschow* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2011); Deighton "A different 1956: British responses to the Polish events, June November 1956," *Cold War History* 6:4 (2006): 455-475. This also appeared in Polish in Pod Redakcją Naukową, Jana Rowińskiego, Przy Współpracy, Tytusa Jaskułowskiego, eds., *Polski październik 1956 w polityce światowej* (Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2006), 235-263; Deighton, "Don and Diplomat: Isaiah Berlin and Britain's early Cold War," *Cold War History* 13:4 (2013): 525-540. See list of publications at <https://www.politics.ox.ac.uk/academic-faculty/anne-deighton.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Influential texts included: Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); the early work of John Lewis Gaddis, especially Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1947* (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1972); Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of our Times* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Vintage, 2005); Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Penguin, 1999).

Zara Steiner, one of the few women historians working on Europe, and who sadly died in February 2020, was a beacon for many other women historians who regretted her relatively low profile, but cherished her work as a historian. See, for example, Zara Steiner, *The Lights that Failed: European International History, 1919-1933* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> The phenomenal three-volume series is Melvyn P. Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, 3 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010). My contribution was "Britain and the Cold War, 1945-1955," 112-132 (sadly, only 6,000 words per author was permitted...).

<sup>9</sup> Anne Deighton, ed., *Western European Union, 1954-1997, Defence, Security, Integration* (Oxford and Reading: EIRU, 1997); Deighton, "The Last Piece of the Jigsaw: Britain and the Creation of Western European Union, 1954," *Contemporary European History* 7:2 (July 1998):181-196; Deighton "The European Union and NATO's war over Kosovo: towards the glass ceiling?" in Pierre Martin and Mark R Brawley, eds., *Alliance Politics, Kosovo, and NATO's war: Allied Force or Forced Allies?* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2000); Deighton, "9/11 and NATO," in Lawrence Freedman, ed., *Superterrorism: Policy Responses* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002); Deighton, "Reassessing the fundamentals: the European Security and Defence Policy," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40:4 (2002):719-743; Deighton, ed. with Gerard Bossuat, *The EC/EU: A World Security Actor? 1957-2007* (Paris: Soleb, 2007); Deighton, "The EU, Multilateralism, and the Use of Force," in Hew Strachan and Sibylle Scheipers eds., *The Changing Character of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Being a Cold War and European Security historian who thought about contemporary policy-making also allowed me a chance to run an annual visiting speaker seminar for ten years in Oxford, mixing up academics and policy makers, and some journalists, which attracted a wide range of specialists to the series. My research students could then also conduct interviews with the visiting speakers if they wished. I now travelled extensively, was invited as a visiting professor to half a dozen continental universities in Europe, and was able to contribute to meetings and conferences alongside policy-makers as well as scholars. Then there was the *groupe de liaison*—a committee of about twelve international historians from across the EC/EU who collaborated on projects, and urged the EU Commission and Council to open up their archives. This group included the late Alan Milward, with whom I co-edited a volume on the late 1950s and early 1960s, a volume which caused much intense pre-publication debate between us about the relative weight of economics and politics in the shaping of the European Community.<sup>10</sup> Britain and the EC/EU has never been an uncontentious topic. Say no more on this for now.

Serving for six years on the Council and Executive Committee of Chatham House (Royal Institute for International Affairs) also gave me a deeper understanding of the world of day-to-day international relations and policy-making. For the Western world was trying to design another new international system, but unlike in 1945, this time it was by building on existing institutions—NATO and the EU in particular, but, curiously, not creating new institutions; and also, by thinking more carefully about human rights and human security.

European Security now required a different approach from ‘pure’ diplomatic history, so I learned to use more interviews, secondary sources, newspapers, etc, than working on the 1940s and early 1950s had required. Each year, I ran what was called a Methods course for graduate political scientists on archives—I called it ‘Truth and Record’ (not all the students got the irony of the title). That was perhaps my most important contribution to a department that was then increasingly immersed in quantitative work—but it was, in a gently subversive way, pretty popular with students. It also kept us all up to date with the rapid changes that were under way in archive collection and storage, as we were all discovering a world in which the internet and smartphone-photography dominated at one end, while at the same time a global research project could mean confronting a total lack of traditional archives for the researcher.

I had a three-year interlude from Oxford between 2003 and 2006, on special unpaid leave from Oxford working in Geneva, at the Swiss-run Geneva Centre for Security Policy. I now had to be up to speed on contemporary events (the invasion of Iraq took place in 2003), thinking about security strategies, EU enlargement, political change in Eastern Europe. My teacher training, and my knowledge of the early postwar years was invaluable here, giving an anchor to discussions that complemented what the quantitative political scientists were also researching, while engaging with young professionals from all over the world. The influential Finnish Professor, Jussi Hahnimäki, very helpfully also arranged for me to create and then teach a course on British foreign policy at the Geneva Graduate Institute. This allowed me to think again about Britain’s imperial past and its significance, building on work I had done earlier with Professor Jan-Werner Mueller, but now particularly relating to the post war visions for a 1940s Third Force that might have kept an equilibrium between the US and the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

Keeping the balance between the demands of the discipline of International Relations, and that of European International History is, I suppose, what has shaped my career. I probably learned most from my doctoral students, many of whom also battled the discipline divide between history and IR, and who had to undergo methods training in IR techniques before they

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<sup>10</sup> Deighton and AS Milward, eds., *Widening, Deepening, Acceleration, the European Economic Community, 1957-1963* (Baden-Baden: Nomos; Brussels: Bruylant: 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Deighton, “The Past in the Present: British Imperial memories and the European Question,” in Jan-Werner Mueller, ed., *Memory and Power in Postwar Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 100-120. This volume was influential when I wrote “‘Entente no-coloniale’?: Ernest Bevin and the Proposals for an Anglo-French Third World Power, 1945-49,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 17:4 (2006): 835-852; Deighton, “Ernest Bevin and the Idea of Euro-Africa from the interwar to the postwar period,” in M-T Bitsch and Gerard Bossuat, eds., *L’Europe Unie et L’Afrique* (Brussels: Bruylant, Paris: LGDJ; Baden-Baden, Nomos-Verlag, 2005); Deighton, “Ernest Bevin,” in Jonathan Wright and S Casey, eds., *Mental Maps of the Cold War*, (London: Palgrave, 2010).

could take their doctorates. Their varied career paths reflect that tension, some seeing a doctorate as a preparation for an academic career, and some who wished to engage more directly with policy-making; but in fact, all were quietly trained as historians as well while in the Department of Politics and IR. They now forge extraordinary careers in academia, government and elsewhere, roving about in Australia, the US, Mexico, Finland, France, Spain, The Netherlands, Switzerland, Turkey, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Singapore, Japan, as well as in the UK.

The dividing lines between disciplines have never been well-defined. If historians can see that what goes round comes round, and that there are discernible patterns of behaviour, they also say that events have a different shape each time they reappear. On the other hand, some of the catch phrases of the IR community—institutional path dependence, paradigm shifts, two-table negotiating games, cognitive dissonance, levels of analysis—are hugely useful for the historian. And at last the tyranny of the ‘Rational Actor’ in Political Science has largely been discarded in an age of emotion and the easily-observed irrationality of politicians and citizens alike. So perhaps the political science pendulum has begun once again to absorb qualitative as well as gold-plated quantitative thinking (which governments of course want for their own data-collection purposes). Historians can also now more easily appreciate what it is that political scientists are often trying to do, while the political scientists realise increasingly that historians are not introverted and detail-obsessed narrative freaks, and that they have helpful things to say to political scientists beyond ‘please don’t generalise’ from a specific narrative.

Indeed, on reflection, I think that these disciplinary red lines and distinctions were in part defined by the institutional structures within universities themselves, which have created unfortunate silos of knowledge, administrative, and ‘curiosity’ blockages. For example, when I first went back to Oxford in 1991, I was able to supervise doctorates on postwar topics for students who were based in the History Faculty, that is, until a management issue arose about whether my Department should stop ‘lending teaching hours’ (i.e., me) to another Faculty without a teaching or payment *quid pro quo*.

There is also a final, but pleasant irony here for me. When I retired and was graciously rebranded as ‘Emeritus Professor of European International Politics’ in my Department of Politics and International Relations, I was also invited to become a member of Oxford’s History Faculty. A good moment!

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