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Doing the Cold War in Utrecht: A European View on the Formation of an International Historian

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"Do they do the Cold War in Utrecht?" was the first question I was asked after braving a cloud of volcanic ash to arrive at the prestigious International Graduate Student Conference on the Cold War in Washington DC in April 2010. Such was my enthusiasm to join, that I took my suitcase to Amsterdam Airport on a daily basis to ensure that KLM's crew would let me onto the first intercontinental flight that was allowed to leave the airport after the notorious eruption of the Eyjafjallajökull volcano in Iceland. Having barely finished my MA-degree in Comparative History, while still working as a Classics teacher at a Dutch gymnasium, I relished the opportunity to share my ideas with such Cold War icons as Odd Arne Westad, Bernd Schäfer and James Hershberg. Although most Europeans – including the entire faculty of the LSE – had not managed to cross the Atlantic, I had gone to great lengths to arrive in Washington exactly to "do the Cold War in Utrecht." Retrospectively, that seemed a long shot – I had a Classics degree from Cambridge and had only recently embarked on a study of the Cold War – but I did it. In this essay, I will explain how.

I am indebted to many people, and I fear there is no room to mention them all. But I have to start with my father, Thomas Crump, who sadly and suddenly died on 31 July 2019. He was a polyglot and a polymath, mastering a dozen languages and almost as many degrees, ranging from Maths to Theology and Trinity College, Cambridge, to Michigan Law School, while ultimately ending up at the University of Amsterdam as a Cultural Anthropologist. He was writing his fifteenth monograph when he died, and Arne Westad's *The Cold War: A World History* was – very aptly for this essay – the only book he never finished reading.[1] The love of writing, reading, and language-learning is in my veins, and initially drove me to pursue a degree in Classics at Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1997. While both the selection process and the degree itself were a tall order for a Dutch teenager, raised in a totally different system – my father had become fully integrated in Amsterdam and we spoke Dutch at home – I soon got hooked on Ancient Philosophy. I was thrilled to be supervised by Professor David Sedley, who taught me how to closely and critically analyse primary sources, think precisely, and construct a convincing argument. His name may mean little to historians, but means a lot to ancient philosophers, and I was lucky to count him among my mentors. Much as I loved cracking my brain both on the languages and the ideas they conveyed, three years of Cambridge were so intense to a relative outsider that once I had achieved all my goals – a First Class Honours in all my papers and the chance to embark on a Ph.D. in Cambridge – I decided to opt out of academia and into teaching instead.

I loved the teacher training course in Cambridge and embarked on a career as a Classics teacher, first for four years in England, and then another six at a grammar school in Utrecht. I was passionate about contributing to my pupils' growth in the widest possible sense and in England I developed a programme on Critical Thinking, whereas in the Netherlands I created a programme in internationalisation and founded a debating society. All those skills would stand me in good stead in later life as a historian, but my activities in internationalisation would prove particularly inspiring with hindsight. I joined the coordinating team of a big Comenius Project on European Citizenship, which also involved schools from a number of

[1] Arne Westad, *The Cold War: A World History* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

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Eastern and Central European countries, ranging from Lithuania and Romania to the Czech Republic, Austria, and a village in former East Germany. This gave me the opportunity to not only visit the abovementioned countries, but also to attend their schools with my pupils, which offered one of the best ways to integrate elsewhere. Through trial and error, I discovered that the other participants in the project had goals that had nothing to do with European citizenship, ranging from raising the profile of their school to travelling abroad, and that I had to make sure that those unwritten goals were achieved for the project to succeed. Coordinating this project taught me some subtle rules about power, whose distribution is not as simple as it may seem at first sight.

That lesson would retrospectively prove central in my doctoral dissertation, but first I still needed to make an unanticipated leap from ancient philosophy to contemporary history. Disillusioned with the fact that teaching Classics in the Netherlands entailed an almost exclusive focus on the languages, I decided to embark on a history degree at Utrecht University. In order to do so, I got in touch with a well-known professor in Early Modern Social-Economic History, Maarten Prak, whose guidance would prove crucial in my career as a historian. Based on my background in Cambridge, Maarten argued that I had already developed some crucial skills as a historian, and he advised me to only complete the third year of the Bachelor's degree in History and embark on the selective Master's programme in Comparative History straight after. Following Prak's advice, I completed the BA in one year – combined with my full-time job as a teacher – and immediately embarked on the MA in Comparative History. The faith and support of a personal mentor were once more crucial in developing the scholar's craft.

Little did I know that the Comparative History MA had a strong bent on Social and Economic History, following the lead of sociologists such as Theda Skocpol, whose 1979 book on *States and Social Revolutions* was used as an example for the Comparative Historical Analysis.[2] I nevertheless began to grow most interested in the Cold War after a tutorial on the German question by Jacco Pekelder and Mathieu Segers, both of whom are now friends and colleagues of mine. Aided by an avid search in online archives and my experience as a teacher in Eastern and Central Europe, I questioned the rather simplistic East-West dichotomy I often encountered and embraced the trend of New Cold War History, which uses the opening of Soviet, East European, and other archives after the collapse of the Soviet bloc to argue for a much more multifaceted interpretation of the Cold War. Unable to do any physical archival research, since I was still teaching Classics, I used all possible primary source collections published by Central European University Press and the National Security Archive as well as the online archives of the Wilson Digital Archive and the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security to write an MA theses in which I developed my own model to compare why the Soviets invaded Hungary in 1956, but not Poland in 1981.[3] I concluded that the Warsaw Pact had played a somewhat different role than had been assumed, which sparked my interest in the internal dynamics of the Soviet alliance. Surprisingly, I could not find a monograph on the Warsaw Pact as a whole, and with the support of Duco Hellema, now emeritus professor in Dutch international relations, the contours of my Ph.D. thesis began to take shape.

"Fortune favours the brave," as Pliny the elder would have it, and, unsure if I had overlooked something vital, I decided to email the eminent historian Vojtech Mastny, who had written and edited most of the material on the Warsaw Pact. I attached a short article in which I argued that smaller Warsaw Pact members had much more influence on the Soviet Union than had been assumed so far. Within twenty-four hours I received a very enthusiastic reply, in which he endorsed my idea and encouraged me to pursue it further. With Mastny's support I decided to use it as a proposal for the International Graduate Student Conference on the Cold War, so as to expose my ideas to a wider international audience. My supervisors in Utrecht were extremely supportive, but none of them were experts on this theme, as was emphasised by the question from the international scholars, "Do they do the Cold War in Utrecht?" that I mentioned at the outset. Apart from providing me

[2] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[3] Wilson Center Digital Archive, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/; the Parallel History Project on Cooperative Security, https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch; and, for example, Vojtech Mastny and Malcom Byrne, eds., *A Cardboard Castle? An Inside History of the Warsaw Pact* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2005).

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with thought-provoking feedback, this conference taught me the necessity to build a network. The warm welcome by Mastny and his wife Rebecca in their house in Washington was a good start. But I had to build it from there.

Upon my return in Utrecht, I was stimulated to apply to a 50/50 research/teaching job in which I could use my research time to write a doctoral dissertation on a topic of my own choice. I got the job and embarked on my Ph.D. in September 2010, where Jan Hoffenaar, a professor in military history, joined Hellema as my Ph.D. supervisors. Their faith in me was most encouraging – I was free to do as I saw fit and set the deadlines instead of vice-versa. The question about whether "they do the Cold War in Utrecht" nevertheless still resonated. After I had decided on the structure of my thesis, I wanted some feedback from international experts in the field, too. I got in touch with Peter Sowden, the editor of the Routledge series on the history of Eastern Europe, and asked him if he was interested in a monograph which would revise the history of the Warsaw Pact. Upon his prompt and enthusiastic reaction, I spent an entire night fitting my Ph.D. proposal into the Routledge book proposal format and sent it to Sowden the next morning. To my astonishment, I not only received feedback from the reviewers, but, after addressing it, also a contract to submit the manuscript in May 2014. I keep telling my students how important it is to take a risk in academia. Accepting the fact that my proposal might have been ripped to pieces, I actually paved the way for publishing a book.

I now had the opportunity to visit archives myself, and started with Berlin, where the extensive archives were easily accessible to me because of my knowledge of German. Supported both by archivists and distinguished scholars who agreed to meet me while in Berlin – such as Lorenz Lüthi and Douglas Selvage – my research developed steadily and the Cold War began to gain a foothold in Utrecht. In order to view the Warsaw Pact from various perspectives, I decided to learn another language. I had already spent the entire summer of 2010 in Russia, opting to learn Russian in the small university town of Petrozavodsk north of St Petersburg so as not to be subjected to English, but I was told that Russian President Vladimir Putin's archival policy would not yield much material for researchers. I could find a lot of sources translated from Polish and Czechoslovak in the German archives, but since the dynamics within the Warsaw Pact seemed determined by the rigid East Germans on one extreme of the spectrum and the dissident Romanians on the other, I decided to learn Romanian instead. I bluffed my way through an intensive Romanian language course in the small Carpathian town of Brasov, using my intimate knowledge of Latin, French, and Italian to get into the advanced level, and after a month of total immersion I decided to visit the Romanian National Archives in Bucharest. The archivists proved particularly keen to help me since I had taken the trouble to learn Romanian and recommended drafting a letter to the director in order to gain access to the classified records during Ceausescu's regime in the second half of the 1960s. I had passed the litmus test.

My archival research confirmed my suspicion that the smaller Warsaw Pact countries had much more influence than usually assumed, something Hope Harrison had already proved for the German Democratic Republic in her book, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall*.[4] Moreover, the classified materials that I was allowed to peruse in Bucharest gave me a thrilling insight into hitherto unknown Sino-Romanian conversations on the Warsaw Pact, which underlined that the Sino-Soviet split played a large role in the emancipation of the smaller Warsaw Pact members. I devoured the books by Lorenz Lüthi and Sergey Radchenko on that topic and also took Lüthi's advice to heart to visit the archives of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* in Rome as a very interesting outsider's perspective on the Warsaw Pact.[5] Combined with several trips to Warsaw, where I met Wanda Jarzabek, and Tirana, where I talked to Ana Lalaj, I gained an increasingly strong sense of the Warsaw Pact's internal dynamics.

Another important aspect in that respect was the invitation by Mastny to contribute to a seminar with eyewitnesses in Prague in July 2011 thirty years after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact. In the hall where the alliance had been dissolved, I

[4] Hope Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

[5] Lorenz Lüthi, *The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), and Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens: The Sino-Soviet Struggle for Supremacy, 1962-1967* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

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met Alex Pravda, a scholar in Russian history from St. Antony's College, Oxford, and we agreed that I would make a request to join St Antony's College as a Senior Associate Member later that year. That stay proved crucial in my further development, since it brought me in touch with a wide range of scholars working on similar topics, whereas in Utrecht I had always been the odd one out. I greatly enjoyed frequenting and even contributing to the seminars of the Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre and the European Studies centre, and was particularly grateful for the way in which I was welcomed by Anne Deighton, now emeritus professor of European international politics at Wolfson College, with whom I have remained in touch ever since. The same applies to Richard Davy, an eminent journalist from the *Times* and eye-witness of much of the process of the Conference on Security and Cooperation (CSCE) in Europe, which is very important for my current research. Moreover, my research stint at St. Antony's allowed me to visit the International History department at the London School of Economics and Political Science on a regular basis, where several influential historians whom I had met at the European Summer School on the Cold War in Padua took an interest in my research, such as Piers Ludlow and Arne Westad, both of whom have regularly advised me since. I also got to know a number of inspiring contemporaries, such as Eirini Karamouzi, Angela Romano, Artemy Kalinovsky, and Corina Mavrodin, with whom I still work with great joy.

The seminars at St. Antony's taught me something important. However thought-provoking they were, it struck me that the ones from the Russian and Eurasian Studies Centre mainly dealt with *internal* affairs in the former *Soviet bloc*, whereas the ones from the European Studies Centre primarily dealt with *international* affairs in *Western* Europe or the European Union. It has continued to puzzle me how research can move in parallel universes, determined more by path dependency than empirical findings. Moreover, the persistent assumption of the Warsaw Pact as a Soviet transmission belt has created the image that there simply were no international relations in Eastern Europe, whereas it was my aim to prove not only that they existed, but also that they mattered. With that aim in mind I subtitled my book *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe*.[6] I thought it might make it more sellable, after several colleagues had raised their eyebrows because I was researching such an outdated relic as the Warsaw Pact. With the burgeoning crisis in Ukraine, the notion of international relations in Eastern Europe grew in relevance, and no one has asked me since why I chose to focus on Eastern Europe. History is, perhaps, often written by the victors, but it shouldn't be.

This is something I also try to teach my students, who remain a continuous source of inspiration. I loved seeing the students' excitement in conducting online archival research and in discovering that history is much more complex than it seems at first sight. The students, too, thrived on my method of treating them as 'young researchers' and stimulating them to concentrate on primary sources from day one, which was one of the aspects that gained me the university-wide teacher-talent prize in 2012. Shortly after that, I designed a course called "Wikileaks from the Warsaw Pact." In this course, the students roleplayed a delegation to the Warsaw Pact's Political Consultative Committee for all meetings in the 1960s on the basis of primary source research, which was such a success that about 200 students enrolled for the course in the ensuing year – a record for such a specialised course. By that stage, I was, however, on maternity leave, expecting our first child, and unfortunately the course was taken off the syllabus. The simulation of the Warsaw Pact taught the students something I already assumed: being the Soviet Union was much less fun than it seemed at first sight.

2014 was the year of another landmark, since I had to defend my Ph.D. thesis in January, as well as submitting the completed manuscript to Routledge in the same year. The Cold War definitively seemed to have arrived in Utrecht, this time in the guise of no one less than Arne Westad, who, together with Robert Service, a professor in Russian History from St Antony's College, Oxford, agreed to join my Ph.D. committee. In the Netherlands, the defence is a public affair, with more than hundred people present, and in this case particularly exciting since the very rare *cum laude* was awarded. In the ensuing *laudatio* my Ph.D. supervisor, Hellema, referring to the fact that I had completed my Ph.D. two years before the deadline, joked that perhaps the child I expected could finally slow me down – I was six months pregnant at the time. Little did we know that our child would appear to be severely mentally disabled, and that continuing to perform at the same level would become an uphill struggle. Our Tommy, named after my father, is now seven but at the developmental age of a two-year old.

[6] Laurien Crump, *The Warsaw Pact Reconsidered: International Relations in Eastern Europe, 1955-1969* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

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He opened our eyes to the beauties of life in a way that no one else could. But raising a son, who can hardly talk, will never read or write, and still needs a regular nappy change aged seven, is a challenge for a young, female researcher. Where my formative years as a doctoral researcher ended, those as a mother started.

Retrospectively, my maternity leave was an early sign of what was to come. Although some colleagues had advised using it to complete my book manuscript, I had to spend every other day in hospital with symptoms of pre-eclampsia. Once Tommy's birth was induced, frequent hospital visits ensued – retrospectively an early sign of his severe development disorder as well as his autism. At the same time, I still managed to obtain tenure in Utrecht and submit the manuscript, ultimately resulting in the George Blazyca prize of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies. According to the jury, my book would "transform our understanding of the functioning of the Soviet bloc, certainly from the security perspective."[7] After this solo-success, I discovered teamwork as great source of inspiration. I loved writing an article with Simon Godard from Sciences Po Grenoble on the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, which took me back to my roots as a comparative historian, and also benefited from excellent feedback from my colleagues at the History of International Relations section in Utrecht.[8] I also learned a lot from being involved with several colleagues from Utrecht and beyond in editing the new edition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of the Cold War* under the auspices of Ruud van Dijk from the University of Amsterdam. With my friend and colleague Susanna Erlandsson from Uppsala University I harked back to an idea we developed during our respective Ph.D.s, by organising a workshop for our contemporaries on the *Margins for Manoeuvre* of smaller states in Cold War Europe. This resulted in a volume that, according to a recent H-Diplo essay, together with my book on the Warsaw Pact, contributed to 'Bringing the (Smaller) State Back In.'[9]

Inviting the Cold War into Utrecht through organising conferences and workshops was not only very stimulating, but also a way to combine an international network with looking after Tommy. I developed a preference for small, specialised workshops *or* bigger conferences, which target a wide audience of scholars, teachers and diplomats. I was lucky to find colleagues such as Anne Deighton, Federico Romero, Radchenko, Leopoldo Nuti and Aryo Makko joining me in this venture, but I also learned a lot from collaborating with diplomats and eyewitness, which culminated in my participation in an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) oral history workshop with approximately thirty diplomats from all-over Europe and the US in 2017. Christian Nünlist from the ETH Zurich had invited me to join this project about the lessons that could be learned from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) negotiations leading to the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* in November 1990.[10] This was a thoroughly thought-provoking experience and once more underlined the fact that "the prefab solution" of extending the European Economic Community (EEC) and NATO into the post-Cold War order, as Mary Sarotte calls it in in her superb book, *1989*, resulted

[7] http://basees.org/news/2017/3/13/laurien-crump-wins-george-blazyca-prize-for-the-warsaw-pact-reconsidered.

[8] Laurien Crump and Simon Godard, "Reassessing Communist International Organisations: A Comparative Analysis of COMECON and the Warsaw Pact in relation to their Cold War Competitors," *Contemporary European History* 27:1, 2018, 85-109, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0960777317000455

[9] Laurien Crump and Susanna Erlandsson, eds., *Margins for Manoeuvre in Cold War Europe: The Influence of Smaller Powers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Bradley Reynolds, "Bringing the (Smaller) State Back In: State of the Field in 'Small State' Research," H-Diplo, April 30, 2021: https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/7617681/h-diplo-state-field-essay-338-bringing-smaller-state-back-state

[10] Christian Nünlist et al., *The Road to the Charter of Paris: Historical Narratives and Lessons for the OSCE Today* (Vienna: OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, 2017), https://osce-network.net/fileadmin/user_upload/publications/RoadtoParisCharterFINALREPORT.pdf

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more from the "acceleration of history" than from design.[11] It also tied in perfectly with the early career research grant from the Netherlands Research Organisation on a project on the CSCE from the perspective of pan-European diplomacy, which I obtained in the same year.

When I applied for my research grant, we had planned to spend half a year in Oxford and the other half at a university in the United States. Instead, Tommy's disability was much more severe than we anticipated, and we moved house to a small village near the German border, two hours away from work, where he could obtain the special needs education he so much needed as well as the tranquillity he craved. For the same reason, I tried to combine my archival research for my next book with school holidays, so that my loving husband, Kenneth (a secondary school teacher), and son could join me, because leaving Tommy alone for more than a couple of nights was not an option. We travelled to Berlin, Florence, and London together and had organised a trip to Berne, but COVID-19 intervened. The archives underscored that the Eastern European angle still has a lot to teach us about the CSCE as a forum for Pan-European diplomacy, rather than serving primarily as a Western instrument for furthering human rights. The Soviet ambassador, Yuri Kashlev, for example called the CSCE "a safety-valve for the hot-pot of international relations" during the controversial Madrid conference in the early 1980s.[12] In a similar vein, the Hungarian national committee for European Security and Cooperation considered the CSCE an instrument for "the multilateral institutionalisation of European security," which confirmed my hypothesis on the CSCE as tool for "the multilateralization of European Security."[13]

In a sense, the fact that I no longer needed to commute to work due to the pandemic came as a relief, and enabled me to concentrate on the foundation of a Global Cold War group in Utrecht, consisting of *inter alia* Lorena De Vita, Frank Gerits, Paschalis Pechlivanis, Corina Mavrodin, and Eline van Ommen, with whom I am writing a textbook on the Global Cold War, which is a transformative experience. Moreover, the transition to online communication offered new opportunities, and prompted me to build a website for the Cold War Research Network, which I had founded several years earlier with my colleagues Giles Scott-Smith from Leiden University and Ruud van Dijk. Now, joined by more than fifty scholars from eighteen different countries, we run monthly seminars on the state of the art in Cold War research with colleagues from all-over the world. Partly because of its success, I have been approached to organise the next European summer school on the Cold War together with the Global Cold War group, following in the footsteps of previous successful summer schools organised in *inter alia* Padua, Trento, Reims and London. Since the conference will be online, the participants won't have to brave a cloud of volcanic ash to arrive in Utrecht, but I can now safely answer the question I was asked eleven years ago in the affirmative: yes, "we do the Cold War in Utrecht."

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[11] Mary Sarotte, *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe, with a new afterword by the author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[12] 'The CSCE in the Soviet Union's Perspective' by Professor Yuri Kashlev, Ambassador of the Russian Federation to Poland, in *From 1975 to 1995 and Beyond: The Achievements of the CSCE – The Perspectives of the OSCE*, Berne, 1995, Dutch National Archives, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, jhr. mr. J.L.R. Huydecoper van Nigtevecht, 1957-1996, Z238/ 9, 30.

[13] 'Erklärung [Hungarian national CSCE Committee]', 5 December 1977, Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv, DZ 22/19, Umsigniert 93357, 2-3.

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archival research on the role of the CSCE in multilateralizing European security and paving the way for the end of the Cold War in the 1980s, funded by a VENI-grant from the Netherlands Research Organisation.

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