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Kataryna Wolczuk (1993-2013)

Having spent the last 20 years at CREES, arriving there in 1993 to do a part-time M.Sc, I have witnessed people come and go, academic structures evolve, buildings go up, décor date and hairs grey. But one thing has endured: the relentless commitment of my colleagues, past and present, to this complex and still misunderstood part of the world.

Little did I know that arriving here in 1993, I would be here 20 years later. Still less did I realise how much CREES, and above all my colleagues would play such an important role in my personal and professional development. The above mentioned commitment left me and continues to leave me in awe – their relentless pursuit of understanding and insight verges on remarkable. And for this, to Julian, Phil, Derek, Hilary, Judy and all the others I am indebted: through them I have come to understand the true value of academic pursuit and the meaning of professional commitment. The fact that they have been such decent and supportive colleagues leaves me doubly fortunate.

Although it has to be said that things did start rather auspiciously, thanks to a rather stern warning from Julian on my appointment as a permanent – yes, permanent! – lecturer in 1996 that 'there is nothing permanent in academia anymore'. Whoops – best not get too excited, then.

But then, how could I not be excited: there was I, an unknown aspiring scholar in the midst of these academic heavy-weights: Bob Davies, Julian Cooper, Phil Hanson, Hilary Pilkington, Maureen Perrie, Arfon Rees, Judy Batt…the list goes on. I can't really convey how small I felt. And yet, far from being intimidating, they took me as one of their own and provided me with an academic apprenticeship which is second to none. On my very first research trip to Ukraine with Paul Hare, the learning commenced: when at the Kyiv Opera House, being serenaded by a sizable chorus of singers in colourful guises, Paul leaned over to me and dryly observed that 'there is an issue of over-employment in the Opera'. This was a sobering but oh-so-accurate assessment, one which I came to realise, was going to be a characteristic CREES.

The key figure in my research experience in my first decade was Judy Batt. Working with her on 'Fuzzy Statehood' project exposed me to ability to fully immerse herself in local contexts and relentless quest for 'deep' understanding. She was a truly inspirational mentor. And more recently, I have been privileged to work with colleagues such as Tim Haughton, Derek Averre, Julian Cooper, David White and Matt Frear. One could not ask for better colleagues. Not only teaching but my research has greatly benefitted from interacting with them. And yet the work goes on. My two ESRC-funded projects are keeping me busy (inundated even), yet the support and stimulation of these same colleagues is utterly indispensable in their delivery.

Each of the 50 faces has a unique story to tell about an utterly unique institution, one that has left the world a better place if only for providing an incomparable insight into 'our' part of the world. It has been a privilege to be part of the team that has made this contribution.

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