

Project Proposal



SECTION 1: PROJECT PROPOSAL AND CASE FOR SUPPORT

Proposed Project Title:	Defending the Nation or Violating Human Rights? The Autobiographical Memory of Former Border Soldiers of the GDR after 1990		
Project Summary: <i>(Maximum 100 words)</i>	This project analyses the connection between politics, collective and individual memory by exploring a collection of life story interviews with former border soldiers of the GDR. In light of ongoing debates about the shortcomings of the unification process and the disregard of East German experiences, it will bring the voices of men which have no recognition in debates about the commemoration of the GDR to the fore. The project will explore how they perceived their military service and how their interpretations changed with the judicial scrutiny and political and media debates about the “coming to terms” in unified Germany.		
Name of non-HE Partner Organisation:	Stiftung Berliner Mauer (Berlin Wall Foundation), Berlin/Germany		
Name of Contact at non-HE Partner Organisation:	Dr Sarah Bornhorst	Email Address:	bornhorst@stiftung-berliner-mauer.de
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	History		
Secondary AHRC Subject Area (if Interdisciplinary):	Choose an item.		
Does the project Include a creative practice component?	No		
If you have listed two subject areas above, do you consider the project to be interdisciplinary?			
If Yes, please briefly state why: <i>(Maximum 100 words):</i>			
Please provide full details of the proposal and make your case for support below: <i>(Maximum 750 words)</i>			
<p><i>This empirically and methodologically innovative project analyses the connection between politics, collective and individual memory by exploring a collection of unpublished extensive life story interviews with former border soldiers of the GDR, undertaken in 2015 and 2016. These interviews are stored in the archives of the Stiftung Berliner Mauer but have not been used for historical research. As part of the project, the PhD student will revise and optimize the registration of this collection and make it accessible for later researchers. It is also envisioned that select documents will be commented upon and integrated in further exhibitions and educational programmes of the Stiftung Berliner Mauer.</i></p> <p><i>The border regime of the GDR has been the object of severe criticism in the Western world from the 1960s onwards, when it was made the official military doctrine to prevent all forms of illegal border crossings, if need be by shooting at civilians. Between 1961 and 1989, 101 people had been killed or had died in an accident while trying to illegally escape over the Berlin Wall. In particular in the 1990s, the legal and political questions around of this infamous “shoot-to-kill order” at the inner German border and its consequences have been vividly debated. There were at least 131 court proceedings, both against former leading state representatives as well as against former border guards. More than 100 people were sentenced to prison terms or fines. However, compared to this wealth of judicial material, we know very little about the</i></p>			

perception of those former GDR border guards who were once on duty at the inner-German border and thus asked to act according to the "shoot-to-kill order".

Against this background, this project is breaking new ground in several ways:

1. In light of the ongoing debate in Germany about the shortcomings of the unification process and in particular the neglect of East German experiences, it will allow to hear the voices of a thoroughly marginalised and sometimes even criminalised group to men. It will explore how they perceived their military service at the inner-German border and the Berlin Wall and how their interpretation of their service changed after the end of the GDR and in light of the intensified judicial scrutiny in unified Germany.

2. By analysing a unique sample of extensive, unpublished life story interviews, this project will not only shed light on how individual experience and collective memory interact, but also reveal how the legal and political coming to terms with the legacy of the political regime of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) influenced the males subjectivities of former East Germans in unified Germany. It will thus contribute to an assessment of military values and male subjectivities in the post-heroic societies of the post-Cold War era and as such will provide key insights into how processes of transitional justice impact on former actors and their new self-images.

3. Another important aspect of this project is that it allows for a diachronical comparison between the narratives presented by the former East German border guards with the narratives employed by former Wehrmacht soldiers after 1945. Comparison on a factual level, between the 'two German dictatorships' of the twentieth century, have marked the public discourse in unified Germany in particular in the 1990s. Without a doubt, such comparisons served political goals (like the delegitimising of the bygone GDR and thus the justification of the unification policies), but they also originated out of the more honourable motive to avoid the mistakes and shortcoming of the de-Nazification procedures in the Federal Republic in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result, criteria and instruments developed for dealing with the Nazi past were now also applied to the coming of terms with the legacy of the 'dictatorship of the Socialist Unity Party'. Such an application was problematic, however, because of the notable historical differences between these two political regimes and in particular because of the very different scales of their misdeeds. To measure border guards who secured a state frontier by means of excessive violence by the same yardstick with Wehrmacht soldiers who fought a war of extermination was highly problematic. That the label of Täterforschung, or 'perpetrator research', was equally applied to both groups did not help a nuanced historical understanding either.

In sum, this project will contribute to a much needed historicization of the post-unification period and a better understanding of the analytical value of historical comparisons more broadly. It was also enrich the permanent exhibition about the inner-German border and its aftermath.

Please provide details of any resources and facilities, including details of any high cost equipment, fieldwork, training, etc., that may be required to complete the project successfully, and where you will seek these resources (e.g. NBCDTP; partner resources; departmental/school funds). Please include estimated costs:

(Maximum 200 words)

In the first year, the PhD student will be offered language training in German (via Newcastle University's School of Languages) and oral history training, provided by Newcastle University's Oral History Collective. Furthermore, in the summer of 2022, the student will be asked to participate in an intense and high-level German language course offered by Free University Berlin or the Goethe Institute in order to be best prepared for the archival work in the second year of the project. Over the three years of this PhD project, the student will furthermore benefit from Annual Cohort Development events offered by the Northern Bridge consortium that will allow the student to acquire key professional and transferable skills. The partner has agreed to host the student for three extended research stays over the course of the project. No high cost equipment is required to complete this project successfully apart from the acquisition of a high-quality microphone, a recording apparatus and a laptop (estimated combined costs: 1500 pounds). Newcastle University provides protected data storage for all relevant data acquired during the duration of the project and guarantees to store the data for at least 10 ten more years.

Please outline the arrangements for communication between the partner organisation and academic host organisation in regard of the project management and the monitoring of academic progress:

(Maximum 150 words)

The academic host organisation and the partner organisation will be in close contact during the entire duration of this project. We will host regular meetings that will involve all project partners and the PhD student via Zoom (or a similar platform) as well as holding personal meetings at key stages of this project. The representative of the partner organization will participate in the selection of the PhD student and will actively contribute to a project presentation at Newcastle University in the second or third year of the project. Newcastle University as the academic host organization will be responsible for the overall project management.

What benefits will accrue to the student and the partner organisation as a result of your collaboration?

(Maximum 300 words)

The partner organization is a charity funded by the German Land Berlin. Its purpose is to document and provide information about the history of the Berlin Wall and the mass migration from the German Democratic Republic as a part and contributory factor of the German division and

the East–West conflict. As part of its activities, the Berlin Wall Foundation does historical research, but often lacks the time and resources for genuine scholarly work. In 2015/16, it had hired a research assistant who did 44 extensive biographical interviews with former East German border guards. These interviews are digitally preserved and transcribed and stored in the Foundation’s archive, yet, so far, no scholarly enquiry has made use of this important historical source for the actions and the memory of those who served at the German-German border between 1961 and 1989. The project in question presents a unique opportunity for a PhD student on modern Central European history to undertake a highly relevant research project that is both intellectually challenging and practically doable. It promises to generate specialist knowledge that would also be of use when it comes to managing future forms of regime change and transitional justice.

By supporting this project, the Berlin Wall Foundation will obtain an in-depth study on this topic whose results could inform regular revisions of its permanent exhibition and would allow the Foundation to better communicate its mission to international visitors. Furthermore, the partner organization would benefit from the international academic exchange with Newcastle University as a basis for possible future international co-operations. As part of this exchange, we plan to organize a co-hosted workshop on working with difficult histories, jointly organized by the Heritage NUCoRE and The Berlin Wall Foundation.

Please briefly state what financial (if any) or in-kind contribution the partner will be making over the duration of the award:
(Maximum 100 words)

The partner will grant the PhD student with unlimited access to its archival holdings during the time of the project and will provide a desk space in its premises for the time of the necessary research trips in Berlin. It will also offer a formal introduction into the partner organisation and organize bespoke training in the handling of the archival material. The partner will also nominate a members of staff (Dr Bornhorst) to provide assistance and supervision for the PhD student while in Germany and will contribute the funds to this member’s travel to Newcastle University, should this become necessary.

Please describe the nature of the collaborative arrangement and the activities the student will be taking with the organisation:
(Maximum 300 words)

Over the course of this project, the student will undertake at least three research trips to the Berlin Wall Foundation. In the second half of the first year, the PhD student will spend four weeks in Berlin to get to know the partner organization, its premises, the exhibition and above all the archival holdings. The contact person will also introduce the student to the relevant research libraries and archives in Berlin, above all the Federal Archive and the Archives of the Stasi, the former East German Secret Police. In the second year, the student will spend an extended research period of 3-4 months at the Foundation in order to analyse the oral history interviews conducted with former border soldiers and stored there. Finally, at the beginning of the third and final year, the student will return to Berlin to conduct further interviews with the former border soldiers about their perception of the project and to complete the archival research for the project. Once the project is successfully completed, we plan two public presentations of the results in form of public lecture by the PhD student, one at the Berlin Wall Foundation (possibly in conversation with 1-2 of the interviewees) and one at the Lit & Phil Library in Newcastle, the largest independent library in the UK outside London.

SECTION 2: SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Prof. Daniel Siemens	School/Department:	Newcastle University, School of History, Classics and Archaeology
Second Supervisor:	Dr Felix Robin Schulz	School/Department:	Newcastle University, School of History, Classics and Archaeology
Additional Advisor:	Dr Alison Atkinson-Phillips	School/Department:	Newcastle University, School of History, Classics and Archaeology
Additional Advisor:	Dr Sarah Bornhorst	Organisation/Institution:	Berlin Wall Foundation, Germany
Additional Advisor:	Dr Gerhard Sälter	Organisation/Institution:	Berlin Wall Foundation, Germany

Explain how the expertise of the supervisory team and external advisors will allow them to support the proposed project and the selected student:
(Maximum 500 words)

The supervisory team consists of two main supervisors from Newcastle University and three advisors (one colleague from the Oral History

Collective at Newcastle University and two advisors based at Berlin Wall Foundation in Germany):

Professor Daniel Siemens, the first supervisor, is professor of European history at Newcastle University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) and an internationally renowned authority in the history of twentieth century German history. He has published extensively on the history of violence and on the history of the GDR, has been postgraduate programme director for history (2018-2020) and is an experienced supervisor. With his research interest in interconnection between legal practices and history, he will help shape the research project and introduce the student to the many specialist debates relevant for this topic.

Dr Felix Schulz, the second supervisor, is Senior Lecturer for Modern European History at Newcastle University and Head of History at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology there. He has published widely on the history of East Germany after 1945, in particular 'Death in East Germany, 1945-1990'. Dr Schulz has extensive supervisory expertise and an excellent oversight of the archival holdings on the GDR in the different Berlin archives. He is particularly well-placed to introduce the student to the archival situation in Germany.

Dr Alison Atkinson-Phillips is Lecturer in Public History at Newcastle University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology and a member of the NU Oral History Collective. She has published widely on commemoration and historical dialogue and has particular interest and expertise in memory studies; specifically, how difficult pasts are remembered and dealt with in the present. She will introduce the student to the methods and international debates in the field of oral history.

Dr Sarah Bornhorst is Director for the Contemporary Witnesses Program and Oral History at the Berlin Wall Foundation. Currently, she is working on the reconceptualization of the Oral History program to include yet unheard voices. A historian by training, she has worked in several history museums and memorial sites in Germany since 2008. In her curatorial and scientific work, she focusses on historical forms and construction of deviant behaviour, the history of Homosexuality and the history of the Berlin Wall. She will be mentor for the student in Berlin, will provide guidance with regard to the relevant collections and will connect this project with other oral history projects currently undertaken in Germany.

Dr Gerhard Sälter is Head of Department Research and Documentation at the Berlin Wall Foundation. In his research he focusses on the practices of ruling, the history of authority and power in their social context. He has published on the GDR border regime, the Berlin Wall, the MfS (the Stasi) and the history of the BND, the German Federal Intelligence Service, as well as on the history of deviance, police, denunciation, justice and imprisonment more widely. He will bring key expertise in the above-mentioned areas to this project.

SECTION 3: RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

Please provide details about the research environment the selected student will be joining and its suitability:

(Maximum 500 words)

Newcastle University's School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA) and the Berlin Wall Foundation are ideal partners for this project, with complementing strengths and expertise. In Newcastle, the PhD student will be integrated into an intellectually stimulating and academically leading history research department with a distinct profile in Modern German and Central European history and a vibrant research culture. Three historians (Kirk, Schulz and Siemens) have particular expertise in Modern German and Central European history, and several other colleagues have a distinct profile in the history of twentieth century conflict and violence (Dale, Hionidou, McCorristine, Quiroga).

The School is also home to the Oral History Unit and Collective (OHUC), a fast-growing centre of oral history theory and practice with strong international links. OHUC will provide key theoretical and methodological inputs as well as oral history mentoring for the student.

Beyond the School, Newcastle University has a very significant cluster of experts on the history and society of modern and contemporary Germany in general and the GDR in particular, involving colleagues based in the School of Modern Languages (Malkmus and Müller), in the School of Arts and Cultures (Sayner and Eckersley) and in Sociology (Gallinat). These scholars are conveyed through the Modern European History Seminar and the newly established NUCore in Heritage. Both groups provide a supportive interdisciplinary grouping of PGR students and academic staff working across a range of disciplines including history, heritage, memory, sociology and literature. The group's workshops bring together PGR students from across the faculty working in the field of modern European history and culture. The student will have the opportunity to attend the regular symposia and workshops. Furthermore, the supervisors will arrange presentations of the project as part of the Modern European History Seminar series at Newcastle University and at the history department of the Humboldt University Berlin (Prof. Wildt).

The Berlin Wall Foundation hosts a permanent exhibition on the history of the German-German border and the Cold War in Germany and organises regular public events. It is also home of a substantial archive on the history of divided Germany which includes rich oral history testimonies, so far largely unexplored by scientists. The student will be embedded in an experienced team of highly qualified historians of the Department Research and Documentation with key expertise in the field (Bornhorst, Sälter) and will furthermore benefit from the foundation's excellent links to research institutions and museums in the German capital. The proximity to the Federal Archives located in Berlin will likewise prove beneficial to the student during the different research stays in Germany. There are already well-established links

between the two main supervisors, the Berlin Wall Foundation and other research institutions dedicated to the study of the GDR and contemporary Germany. The PhD student will therefore be rapidly inducted into key research networks and environments in the UK and Germany which will should provide an excellent stepping stone for the student's further career.

SECTION 4: STUDENT SPECIFICATION

For further information about this Collaborative Doctoral Award and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:

Lead Supervisor (or alternative Contact)	Prof. Daniel Siemens	Email:	daniel.siemens@newcastle.ac.uk
Expressions of interest must be received no later than:	15/01/2021		
Expressions of interest should be accompanied by the following documentation:	CV; Personal Statement; Writing Sample; Proof of German Language Skills, 2 letters of recommendation		
Interviews for shortlisted candidates are expected to take place:	Between 14 and 28 February 2021		

APPLICANT SPECIFICATION

Note, applicants must also meet the criteria for the acceptance on a doctoral programme as set out by the host institution's Postgraduate Admissions Service.

Education and Professional Qualifications	Essential Criteria	B.A. and M.A. in History, Law, or a related field
	Desirable Criteria	
Research and Impact Experience and Training	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	previous experience with Oral history is desirable
Professional Practice and Job-related Experience	Essential Criteria	
	Desirable Criteria	experience working or volunteering in the heritage sector (professional and voluntary experience)
Interpersonal Skills	Essential Criteria	being of a collaborative mindset
	Desirable Criteria	
Other Factors	Essential Criteria	good command of German (level B2 or above) required, plus a willingness to spend extended periods in Germany for research
	Desirable Criteria	