

[CFP: GDR Today V, Birmingham \(31.05.2019\)](#)

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Call for Papers: 'GDR Today V' 12-13 September 2019

Deadline for abstracts: 31 May 2019

Papers are invited for a two-day postgraduate colloquium focusing on memories and histories of GDR politics, culture, and society. The event will be held at the University of Birmingham on 12-13 September 2019.

Confirmed discussants are: Dr Stephan Ehrig, Prof. Sara Jones, Dr Debbie Pinfold, Prof. Anna Saunders, Dr Joanne Sayner, Dr Marcel Thomas and Dr David Zell.

Prof. Jan Palmowski (University of Warwick) will give the keynote lecture at the event.

The year 2019 marks the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the revolutions across Central and Eastern Europe which swept away over 40 years of Communist rule. As this momentous anniversary draws closer, the GDR proves more than ever to be a popular topic of academic research. New approaches have attempted to locate the GDR's place within a wider transnational context, as well as consider aspects of Heimat, identity and memory.

The GDR remains central to debates about identity and shared cultural values in the Berlin Republic. Prolonged controversy about appropriate memorials to remember the GDR on the one hand and revelations about the Stasi past of high-ranking politicians on the other continue to trigger public discussions about whether the reunified Germany has truly 'come to terms with' (*aufgearbeitet*) the socialist past. Most recently, new divides have been opened up along the former Iron Curtain with the refugee crisis, as the East German past has been blamed for hostility towards refugees in the new federal states.

Over the last two decades or so, scholars have made significant progress to challenge top-down images of the GDR as a totalitarian *Stasiland* which dominated the years immediately following reunification. Since the late 1990s, they have

increasingly turned away from the focus on the repressive state apparatus and have instead begun to explore everyday life and GDR culture in its full complexity. This research has helped to counter simplistic top-down approaches and reveal the inherent tensions in socialist society. Recent volumes have increasingly used memory as a lens through which to examine the GDR. They have thus not only firmly established a counter-perspective to the one-dimensional approaches to East Germany which dominated the early 1990s; they have also encouraged a fruitful engagement between past and present in our understanding of socialist East Germany and its afterlives.

The colloquium is the fifth in the series of 'The GDR Today', which was launched in 2014 at the University of Birmingham, was subsequently held in 2015 at the University of Bristol, at Bangor University in 2017, and Newcastle University in 2018. The series has so far brought together a range of researchers from across Europe and North America. The papers presented previously exhibited a wide range of fresh approaches to conceptualising the GDR and its legacy in contemporary Germany from several disciplines. Like its predecessors, this colloquium is designed as a forum for postgraduate researchers to discuss the state of scholarship on the GDR and identify areas for future research. We are keen to hear again from those who presented previously in the series, but also warmly invite new postgraduate students, who are studying for a Doctorate or Master's degree and working on the GDR, to present their research and join the debate.

Questions that might be considered include, but are not limited to:

- How are the events of 1989 remembered in Germany today?
- How do events in the GDR in 1989 compare to other Central and Eastern European revolutions?
- How important is the transnational and European context of the GDR?
- How did the Cold War affect the GDR?
- How did the GDR influence the concept of Heimat and how successful were attempts to create a separate East German identity?
- How can particular aspects of East German history and culture contribute to an understanding of the GDR as a whole?
- What patterns can be identified in the memory debates of the last twenty-five years, and how have these shaped our views of the GDR?
- How has the way we research the GDR changed over time?
- To what extent has our understanding of concepts used to describe life

- in East Germany changed over time?
- What can comparisons with other states, societies and cultures tell us about the nature of society in the GDR?
 - To what extent has reunified Germany 'come to terms with' (*aufgearbeitet*) the socialist past of the GDR?

We invite proposals for papers of no more than 10 minutes examining any area of the history, memory or culture of the GDR, including film, literature, museums, politics and the built environment. Students may choose to present an overview of their thesis as a whole, or an aspect of it on which they would particularly like feedback.

Abstracts of no more than 200 words should be submitted to gdrtodayv@gmail.com by 31 May 2019. Please also include a brief biography including place and stage of study.

The GDR Today colloquium will include cultural events and conference dinner on the evening of 12 September.

There will be no conference fee for presenters at the GDR Today V colloquium and the conference dinner will be fully-funded. Speakers will need to source their own funding for travel and accommodation.

The Institute for German Studies at the University of Birmingham will make available up to 5 small travel bursaries for the colloquium. These will be allocated on a competitive basis. Details of how to apply will be provided to speakers on acceptance of their proposal.

Contact:

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The colloquium is being funded by the Institute for German Studies, University of Birmingham. The GDR Today V is being organised in collaboration with Bangor University, the University of Bristol and Newcastle University.

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