

## CfP: Politics as Family Affair?

### Political Activity, State Intervention and Privacy in the Russian Noble Family, 1762-1917

Noble families were tightly interwoven with imperial politics in tsarist Russia. They were subject to state regulation; familial resources were a powerful instrument in the political game; and some private family circles developed into influential spheres of political debate and even action. This multi-faceted interconnection of family, privacy, and politics can be traced throughout the “long nineteenth century”. When Catherine the Great allowed the Russian nobles to leave the state service in 1762, she intended them to be her agents in the provinces. The noble family was the key to Catherine’s plan: Many nobles designed their private lives on the estates as careful imitations of the imperial residences, thereby turning the family into an instrument of political representation. In the course of the century, the Russian tsars found other means to use the family for political purposes. A famous example is Nicholas I’s successful attempt to portray his own family as the embodiment of the Russian autocracy. On the other hand, nobles themselves were none too hesitant in taking advantage of their familial relations and networks to promote personal careers or achieve political goals. A less deliberate form of the close connection of family and politics was the tremendous influence that their private family homes exercised on the making of modern Russian social thought and intellectual culture: The family served as a “laboratory of human relations and a microcosm of society” (S. Lovell).

These and similar phenomena have only come into view thanks to major shifts in research on the Russian nobility. Earlier works portrayed the noble family as a rigidly hierarchical institution in which a cold, unfriendly atmosphere prevailed. Its political relevance was commonly reduced to the socialization of loyal, obedient imperial subjects. This harsh image has been softened by studies pointing at the deep emotional affection and intimacy that in fact characterized the relationships within many noble families. The political and social implications of the noble family life, however private and secluded it may seem at first sight, have only recently become a subject of historical research (Mary Wells Cavender, John Randolph, Priscilla Roosevelt).

Our knowledge on the dynamic interconnections between family and politics has nonetheless remained heterogeneous and fragmentary. Research on this topic often requires small-scale approaches and careful work with ego-documents, which makes scholarly exchange all the more important. For this reason we would like to bring together, for the first time, scholars working on various aspects of family and politics in imperial Russia (1762-1917) for an international workshop. We are very pleased that Professor John Randolph has agreed to be the keynote speaker. The workshop will serve as a forum for the discussion of work in progress on related subjects; the aim is to enhance academic contact and establish a network of colleagues who work on related topics. Doctoral and post-doctoral researchers of Russian nobility are particularly encouraged to submit an abstract.

When discussing the broad realm of family and politics, the focus will be on the following four aspects:

1. **Key areas and roles:** Is it possible to identify key areas in which the noble family’s political significance was particularly prominent? Which were the roles the noble family acquired in tsarist politics? Among the more well-known functions are the understandings of the family

as a link between state and society, or the family as mediator of cultural values. Which were the crucial mechanisms to fulfill these and other functions?

2. **Representation:** How did noble families represent themselves, how did the media and contents of their self-representation change over the course of the nineteenth century? How did other agents (i.e., state bureaucracy, other social groups, foreign visitors) understand and portray the noble family and its role in imperial politics, e.g. as an image of state and nation?
3. **Internal composition:** Research on family always needs to pay attention to its internal composition and power structures. How did the individual members of the Russian noble family interact amongst each other and with society? Which power asymmetries existed and how did this change over time, specifically with respect to gender? Is “generation” a useful category to grasp transformations within the family?
4. **Contextualization and periodization:** How do changes and continuities within the realm of family and politics relate to other developments in state and society? Which parallels and/or inconsistencies can be found? Does research on the noble family yield any indications for larger periodizations of the nineteenth century in tsarist Russia?

The workshop will take place 25-26 May 2012 at the Institute for Eastern European History at the University of Tuebingen, Wilhelmstr. 36, 72074 Tuebingen. Participants will be asked to give a short presentation (15 minutes) at the workshop and to circulate their papers in advance. Abstracts (400 words) and a short CV should be submitted by 15 September 2011 to Dr. Katharina Kucher ([katharina.kucher@uni-tuebingen.de](mailto:katharina.kucher@uni-tuebingen.de)). Travel expenses may be reimbursed in part.

Notification of conference participation will be delivered by 15 November 2011. The pre-circulated contributions should be no more than 2000 words (incl. footnotes) and must be submitted by 15 April 2012.