



2009 WORKSHOP

**IDENTIFYING THE PERSON: PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE**

*St Antony's College, University of Oxford*

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## **Abstract**

### **'All Roads Lead to Moscow' or Did Chekov's Three Sisters Have a Residence Permit?**

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My paper examines the challenges faced by the Tsarist state as it attempted to keep track of its urban population in the city of Moscow at the end of the nineteenth century. These endeavours are set against the background of a rapidly changing society that required an ever increasing number of categories to describe social status and access to or restriction of privileges.

Tsarist society dating from the time of Peter the Great was built upon a system of ranks, with each estate or social group being granted privileges or exemptions from state impositions according to the service they provided the state. Whilst the usual exemptions from military service and taxation are well known, there has been little work on the lesser known privileges of mobility and its antithesis, the static position of residence. The attempt to track all the inhabitants of the Empire and to register them in a static position became a matter of increasing complexity from the time of Catherine the Great as the empire expanded its borders. The complexity of this challenge to bureaucratic standardisation only increased in the 19th century, as society changed in the wake of the emancipation of the serfs and the cities began to feel the impact of state imposed industrialisation towards the end of the century. Of particular concern was the registration of inhabitants in the major cities of the Empire, St Petersburg and Moscow. This paper uses the city of Moscow in the second half of the 19th century as a case study and examines the attempts of the state and the city government to categorise the inhabitants of Moscow in order to register them in a fixed position and the increasing complexity of the task. It will also consider the inhabitants of the Empire who could not be registered in Moscow for political, racial, religious or social reasons or who were there under strict supervision. The treatment of these excluded and supervised categories illuminates the efforts of the autocratic state to maintain the ethnic and social purity of its cities and avoid the societal

upheaval it saw arising in its Western European counterparts.

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