

BOOK REVIEWS

Registration and Recognition. Documenting the Person in World History. Ed. by Keith Breckenridge and Simon Szreter. [Proceedings of the British Academy, vol. 182.] Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012. xx, 532 pp. £100.00; \$185.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000527

This volume stems from a workshop held at St John's College, Cambridge, on 7–10 September 2010 with the support of a British Academy conference grant to the two editors, Keith Breckenridge, Associate Professor at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) in Johannesburg, and Simon Szreter, Professor of History and Public Policy in the History Faculty, University of Cambridge. The editors are members of *Identinet*, the international network for the history of identity documentation, (<http://identinet.org.uk/>).

Their introduction and the nineteen chapters – organized into four parts – offer fundamental new insights and virtually draw an agenda for future research in the history of registration by arguing for the need to shift the scholarly perspective on two key issues in the field: the relationship between registration and “modernity”, and the relationship between control and empowerment as goals of registration practices.

As the editors clearly explain in their introduction, the literature on registration – Goody, Foucault, Giddens, Corrigan, and Sayer are explicitly mentioned – has “an unjustifiable preoccupation with developments in Europe in the modern period” (p. 6). Indeed, as in other research fields, European modernity has hitherto been prejudicially assumed to be the origin of registration practices and as the measure against which extra-European experience has been compared. This volume convincingly questions these Eurocentric assumptions from three points of view.

First, Rebecca Flemming's chapter on registration practices in ancient Rome and Athens, and Richard von Glahn's brilliant contribution on more than 2,000 years of Chinese imperial history, are witness to the importance of practices of registration inside and outside Europe long before the modern period. Similarly, Osamy Saito and Masahiro Sato's essay notes the brief seventh-century Japanese experiment with the household registration system imported from Tang China, addresses the reintroduction of registration practices under the Tokugawa dynasty in the late sixteenth century, and highlights some fundamental continuities between the latter system and the allegedly more “progressive” Meiji system.

Second, whereas the literature has described the advent of registration in connection with the process of European state formation, this volume insists on the importance of community-based forms of registration. This point is exemplarily made in the chapter by Henk Looijesteijn and Marco van Leeuwen on the Dutch Republic. Here not only the multiplicity of denominational (i.e. Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, Mennonite, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi Jewish) registration is discussed, but also registration stemming from guilds, local associations, the Dutch East India Company (VOC), and the Dutch West India Company (WIC). Moreover, while a transition from community-based to centralized registration systems is sometimes envisaged in the literature, this volume underlines the coexistence and intertwining of public and private forms of registration, in the past as well as in the present. For instance, in comparing the parish registration systems in England and Wales, North America, and the Caribbean, Simon Szreter's chapter reveals how the former came to play a fundamental and empowering role in connection with the Poor Laws.

Third, and related to the previous point, a fascinating anthropological perspective is included in the volume, urging researchers to expand registration history to non-written practices based on micro-scale recognition and mutual trust. This approach fundamentally questions another key element in the traditional vision of registration – put forward by Foucault in particular – one in which writing is understood to be the key feature of the European states' wish to improve their knowledge of, and power over, their subjects and citizens. Although this perspective is not particularly explored in the essays – with the notable exception of Tamar Herzog's chapter on early modern Spain and Spanish America – it is presented in the editors' introduction in a way that establishes it as an indispensable approach for future research. Even more so because the editors stress the importance of unwritten forms of registration in the world we live in now, as is the case for the 30 per cent of allegedly "unregistered", i.e. not institutionally registered, children in Asia and Africa.

As should be clear by now, this is not a volume that praises Foucault's genius. Besides the points mentioned above, the contributions here also question the French philosopher's tendency to link every activity of registration to an explicit purpose of social control by the authorities. As in much of the recent literature on the history of prison and psychiatry, this critique allows the contradictions and limits of state "governmentality" to emerge, up to the point that a virtual "no will to know" of the state is noted here, as in Keith Breckenridge's contribution on twentieth-century South Africa, in Ravindran Gopinath's chapter on "Identity Registration in India during and after the Raj" (for the colonial period), and in Frederick Cooper's essay on French Africa between 1945 and 1960.

Moreover, the volume reveals the emancipative dimension of vital registration. Identity registration systems are viewed as an "infrastructure of social rights" (p. 29), "enabling [individuals'] legally-recognized personhood to pursue their own self-interested purposes" (p. 22). In this sense, as Paul-André Rosental puts it, they participate "in the construction of civil society" (p. 157). This holds true when they are explicitly intended to do so, as in the case of the nineteenth-century registration system in Egypt (Khaled Fahmy) or the one created in the British Caribbean to enforce the abolition of the slave trade (Stanley L. Engerman); but also when they are *de facto* used as emancipatory tools by the population against the will of the very authorities that formally conceive and manage them. A counter use of the official system involves forgeries and document fraud playing a role, as Andrew MacDonald narrates in his fascinating contribution, which reminds us that "human agents have a habit of marching out of tune with even the most rigorous, repressive registration regimes" (p. 255).

The emancipative dimension of vital registration is *the* key theme of the volume. Its interpretation, however, remains contradictory. For, once the univocity of the "social control" paradigm is rejected and the link between registration and rights is underlined, two directions are possible – both present in this volume, without the underlying epistemological contradiction being explicitly addressed.

On the one hand, the question of "social control" can be put aside altogether in order to shed full light on emancipative registration. This seems to be the attitude of the editors of this volume, as they explicitly distinguish registration as a tool of social control from "registration as recognition" (or "civil registration") – "the registration of persons for purposes of conferring public recognition of their legal personhood and status" (p. 30) – and consider the latter as the only legitimate issue in the field of research they intend to establish.

On the other hand, the intertwining of the social control and empowerment functions of registration can be underlined. This implies not only that – as C.A. Bayly argues in his foreword – the traditional focus on "the domineering, instrumental, counting state" can be "moderated" by bringing in more "contingently benign features of the registration of persons" (p. x). In this way, the very "duality" (Shane Doyle) or "ambivalence" (Andreas Fahrmeir) of vital registration is fully recognized: that is, in the words of Shane Doyle, the

fact that “it can serve equally as a foundation for poverty alleviation and social justice, and as a means of state control through the better monitoring of citizens and exclusion of non-citizens” (p. 277).

The latter approach seems to open up better perspectives for research. By bringing both elements together, scholars can address the fluidity and duality of registration systems to investigate a range of issues, including: (a) how they are affected by changing political regimes and ideologies; (b) how they operate at different scales (local, national, global) and among conflicting interests; and (c) how each registration system operates differently in relation to different groups of population – which, in turn, it also contributes to defining.

From this perspective, the fundamental contribution of this volume is not so much in the establishment of a *new* research field – as its editors seem to believe – but in the broad and dynamic methodological frame it offers for a long-term, global, and comparative study that places research on registration firmly at the crossroad of various disciplines, methodologies, and perspectives.

Moreover, the relevance of the discussion about registration goes far beyond historiography, and directly affects our understanding of present developments. The chapters in the fourth part of the volume (“Registration, Recognition, and Human Rights”) in particular explore recent experience related to civic registration: Uruguay’s 1934 Children’s Code (Anne-Emanuelle Birn), the interwar international campaigns for children’s rights (Dominique Marshall), post-apartheid South Africa (Francie Lund), and Africa as a whole (James Ferguson). The editors have perhaps made a choice here to focus on South American and African children’s rights; in their own introduction, however, they make a broader point, reminding us of the potential dangers of the “extraordinary conjuncture in the history of identity registration” we live in (p. 29), at the crossroads of post-9/11 expansion of registration technology, the application of computerized searchable database information systems, and the “emerging trend of commercial supply and delivery of these systems to states” (p. 29). This is a concern that many will share, and one that again shows the intrinsically double nature of registration, inseparably made up of control drives and empowerment potentials.

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TURCATO, DAVIDE. *Making Sense of Anarchism. Errico Malatesta’s Experiments with Revolution, 1889–1900*. Palgrave MacMillan, Basingstoke [etc.] 2012. 275 pp. £60.00. doi:10.1017/S0020859013000539

Filling an undeniable historiographic gap, Davide Turcato has produced a meticulous and engrossing English-language biography of Errico Malatesta and, at the same time, a thought-provoking reassessment of the nature of classical anarchism (both as a movement and an ideology) and its historiographic avatars. His book has a two-tier focus. It examines a brief stretch of Malatesta’s long militant career: the critical and formative years 1889–1900, which represented a heyday for the Italian and international movement. In addition, through the erudite use of interpretive sociology and a determined, cogent central argument, the monograph also delivers an ambitious re-examination of late nineteenth-century anarchism, with contemporary ramifications. As the volume’s title suggests, it goes some way towards “making sense of anarchism”, weighing and