CrossMark

computerized fingerprint records to confirm the identity of pension claimants, pioneered in KwaZulu in the late 1980s and early 1990s and then extended countrywide.

In unmasking the biometric state, Breckenridge brilliantly extends the post-Marxist literature on bureaucratic state building in South Africa (by Greenberg, Posel, Robinson, Duncan and Evans). While he himself is clearly anxious about the authoritarian possibilities of surveillance (discussed especially in his epilogue), Breckenridge is sensitive to the overlap between the progressive and repressive dimensions of the state: biometric identification, although rooted in racial biology, segregation and control before and under apartheid, also facilitated the massive, poverty-reducing expansion of the welfare state after apartheid. He insists that 'biometric forms of identification … lie at the heart of the story of South African history' (p. ix), but he does not locate his analysis of biometric state building within the broader story of state building, making it difficult to assess precisely how important this part of the bigger picture was. At the outset he suggests that the centralized storage of fingerprints in Pretoria ('biometric centralization') 'affects almost every aspect of institutional life in South Africa – from banking to vehicle licensing' (p. 19), but he never returns to this theme.

Breckenridge makes a strong case for understanding biometric state building in South Africa in the early twentieth century in the context of the British Empire. His account becomes more parochial for the second half of the twentieth century. Why? We are left with a sense of the importance of the global context but no understanding of when and why the importance of this context varies. We are told that the most ambitious biometric project today is in India, where the Aadhaar programme registers people using digitized images of fingerprints and irises. Was this influenced at all by the South African experience? Technological diffusion is traced, but not explained.

JEREMY SEEKINGS
Centre for Social Science Research, South Africa
jeremy.seekings@gmail.com
doi:10.1017/S0001972016000425

JEMIMA PIERRE, *The Predicament of Blackness: postcolonial Ghana and the politics of race*. Chicago IL and London: University of Chicago Press (hb US$97 – 978 0 226 92302 4; pb US$32 – 978 0 226 92303 1). 2012, 263 pp.

As an academic living in and writing on South Africa, I am often entangled in conversations about race. Whiteness, my own and others', and blackness, of various forms and with various definitions, structure everything from my research to my casual everyday interactions. Race can feel inescapable in South Africa. Travelling in other parts of this continent, and elsewhere in the global South, I have been struck by the way in which race is seldom spoken aloud even as it clearly plays a role in social relations and collective imaginings.

Jemima Pierre's excellent book argues that race impacts just as importantly on culture, politics and lived experience elsewhere in Africa as it does in the South. *The Predicament of Blackness* is motivated by the urge to highlight the critical failure of thinking that race does not really matter in a context with a majority black population. She makes a strong case for 'recognising postcolonial African societies as structured through and by global White supremacy' (p. 1).

The book is at its best during Pierre's analyses of her well-chosen case studies. Discussing 'development Whites' and 'Peace Corps Whites', the two main

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972016000437 Published online by Cambridge University Press

stereotypes of whiteness evinced by international visitors to Accra, she writes that expat spaces equate to a 'local articulation of a historical global political economy of race and power' (p. 71). Far from being unique, out of place or irrelevant, tropes of whiteness within Ghana are part of much larger global racial forms. An upper-class black Ghanaian 'has to *perform* his status in order to be read as upper class' (p. 86), whereas a white visitor – even one wearing sandals, a backpack and local clothing – automatically retains access to status on the basis of an unshiftable white positionality, as a consequence of the 'transnational significance of race' (p. 103). This argument is reinforced later in the book when Pierre describes the complex relations between black Ghanaians and black diaspora visitors, especially African Americans. These are particularly important with regards to Ghana's placement within histories of slavery, which are most commonly figured as being 'owned' by the black diaspora, with Africa defined as an originary location rather than as a space that was also implicated in and marked by slavery, and suffered considerably as a result of it.

Pierre offers convincing and often moving descriptions of her own experiences as a Haitian-American researcher in Ghana – of, for example, uncomfortable socializing at expat bars in Accra (p. 70), attending state-sponsored heritage tourism events in the slave sites of Elmina and Cape Coast (p. 138), and quizzing Ghanaian interlocutors about their uses of and feelings towards skin-lightening products (p. 103). She locates her arguments appropriately within a historical context, suggesting that, in postcolonial Ghana, white power and privilege remained mostly intact as part of a global system of racialization, while 'Pan-Africanism and African racial self-determination served as ideological and cultural, but ultimately ineffective, responses' (p. 39) to the larger problematics of white power. A chapter on the historical political economy of the country is too lengthy: a briefer description would have easily sufficed to make the point about the historical embeddedness of these racial formations and how much they owe to the processes of colonization and decolonization and an always somewhat ambiguous postcoloniality.

The final major chapter of the book deals with the failings of African studies and diaspora studies emerging from the global North to properly account for Africa as a place that is both modern and an important part of the discursive relations of race and power that characterize the contemporary world as a whole. Pierre's arguments here are powerful – she shows clearly how the 'culture-ethnic framework' common to scholarly work on Africa 'upholds an essentialist (and racialist) African difference' (p. 202) – but also problematic in terms of the book as a whole. It seems to me that what is significant about her project is the way in which it shows the complicated modalities and consequences of race in Ghana, a place that is often imagined, both by outsiders and by Ghanaians themselves, to be beyond the necessity of acknowledging race. This final chapter, however, suggests that what Pierre believes is most important is the failure of developed world scholarship on Africa, rather than her many critical insights into how race inflects on politics and daily life in Ghana. To my mind, this reads like a turning away, yet again, from Ghana and from Africa in general, where a nuanced discussion of continental cultures is in fact only clearing the path for a disciplinary conversation between gifted scholars from the North. I would have liked to see Pierre retain Ghana, and Africa, at the centre of her work, rather than shifting back to a set of scholarly negotiations that privilege thinkers in the US and UK.

Nonetheless, *The Predicament of Blackness* is a bold and insightful book and, particularly in its thick descriptions of Accra and other Ghanaian spaces, it offers a valuable and convincing description of how Ghana – and consequently

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972016000437 Published online by Cambridge University Press

larger senses of Africa – fits within the global politics of racialization and white privilege.

NICKY FALKOF
Department of Media Studies, University of the Witwatersrand
nicky.falkof@wits.ac.za
doi:10.1017/S0001972016000437

PAUL GIFFORD, *Christianity, Development and Modernity in Africa*. London: C. Hurst & Company (pb £18.99 – 978 1 84904 477 6). 2015, 187 pp.

What role can Christianity play in an Africa seeking modern development? This is the question Paul Gifford addresses in his most recent book. The book is structured around the argument that there is a major difference between an African 'enchanted imaginary' expressed in African Pentecostalism and a development-oriented Christianity exemplified by the Catholic Church in Africa. The first form of Christianity is deeply embedded in African religious world views, such as a belief in spiritual beings and witchcraft. The second form of Christianity is characterized by a strong focus on development and internal secularization. The argument of the book is that two dysfunctional forces – namely the enchanted religious imagination and a neo-patrimonial political culture – hinder Africa from joining that world and that Catholic Christianity fails to address this by focusing merely on development and inculturation.

Gifford begins with a call for a more diverse definition of Christianity in order to avoid analysing all forms of Christianity in Africa as a single category, as that entails the risk of essentializing our understanding of Christianity in Africa. Gifford argues that what is significant about Ghanaian Christianity, for instance, is not necessarily Christianity itself, but rather 'something local and cultural, something Ghanaian or African' (p. 5). Three chapters are dedicated to Pentecostalism in Africa, which the author approaches through a discussion of an African enchanted religious imagination in which spiritual forces are thought to strongly influence people and matters of the physical world. This is exemplified by the teachings of the Nigerian pastor Daniel Olukoya and his focus on destructive evil forces and spiritual warfare. Another prominent feature of Pentecostalism, the prosperity gospel, is also discussed, drawing extensively on the work of another Nigerian pastor, David Oyedepo. On the basis of this, Gifford argues that Pentecostalism in Africa and the enchanted religious imagination on which Pentecostalism draws enforce a belief in destiny rather than individual responsibility.

In the next four chapters, Gifford turns to the Catholic Church. Global Catholicism is presented as a disenchanted version of Christianity that has become internally secularized and which plays the role of a large development actor rather than a church. Gifford notes that there is a discrepancy between this disenchanted institutional Catholicism and the enchanted world in which numerous African Catholics live. He furthermore asserts that the Catholic Church's theological attempts to adapt to African religious practices, or inculturation, ignores the enchanted religious world view and therefore fails to address it. In the concluding chapter, Gifford returns to the initial question on the role of Christianity in developing Africa. Pentecostalism is understood as dysfunctional and harmful. And the Catholic Church, with its internal secularization and development focus, is unable to provide alternative answers to the enchanted religious needs of people in Africa.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0001972016000437 Published online by Cambridge University Press