and otherwise severed from social experiences outside them. To correct this misapprehension, several chapters in the volume pay special attention to the dynamic relation between city and village, especially the ways in which the latter continues to exert influence on many urbanites, who, willy-nilly, must contend with changing imaginings and articulations of 'home', 'origin' and 'belonging'.

The key contribution in this regard is Peter Geschiere's analysis of funerals as a mode of tracking urbanites' shifting imaginations of belonging, mobility and community. The chapter draws primarily on data from the author's research in Cameroon, but, along the way, Geschiere makes critical detours into other African settings, eventually arriving at an intellectual destination in which funeral ceremonies emerge as critical moments for the apprehension of changing forms of identification and belonging.

Of late, cities as spatio-temporal emblems of African agents' inexhaustible capacity for improvisation have provided fodder for much 'Southern' theorizing. The foremost thinkers in this nascent critical tradition are, in no particular order – and to name just a few – Garth Myers, the Comaroffs, Edgar Pieterse, Martin Murray, Sarah Nuttall, Achille Mbembe, Michael Watts and AbdouMaliq Simone (who has an interesting chapter here on the social dimensions of city-making in Africa). This volume adds a much needed analytic and conceptual layer to this engaging scholarship, with the important addendum that the contributions here take as provocation the key problem of unpacking citizenship through the 'lived and imagined practices of city dwellers' (p. 14). In this latter aim, the volume succeeds fully.

Nevertheless, the omission of the state as an object of analysis is striking, and I cannot help but wonder if this was dictated in any way by the resolutely anti-hegemonic focus of the book. No less puzzling is the absence of the internet, as important an infrastructure and 'space' of belonging as any across Africa today. These are minor blind spots that take nothing away from a well-edited and superbly written collection. Students and scholars of African cities, urbanization, citizenship, youth, architecture and religiosity will find a lot to like in its well-researched and deeply stimulating chapters.

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KEITH BRECKENRIDGE, *Biometric State: the global politics of identification and surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (hb £69.99 – 978 1 107 07784 3). 2014, xi + 252 pp.

This is an innovative and exciting contribution to the study of the 'modern' state both in South Africa and globally. Breckenridge's focus is on the technologies of identification and surveillance, and thus contributes to the growing literature on how the South African state sought to control its population. He demonstrates that South African state building cannot be understood without attention to the global context, and that South Africa in turn served as a 'global stage' on which the development of biometric systems for population registration had repercussions elsewhere.

Breckenridge builds on the work of scholars of other parts of the world (in the past and present) on state bureaucracies' efforts to register populations – their births, marriages and deaths – using documentary technologies of identification (passports, identity cards, birth certificates, driving licences). Breckenridge's concern is not with documentation per se, however, but with biometric registration: that is, technologies that allow for machines to identify people through fingerprinting (or, very recently, iris and voice recognition). The 'biometric state' is 'a state that is organised around technologies and architectures of identification that are very different – and which function politically very differently – from the older forms of written identification that have produced the modern state' (p. 8).

*Biometric State* begins in the early 1850s, when the inventor of fingerprinting, Francis Galton, toured Southern Africa, developing the racial biology that informed both racial segregation and, Breckenridge suggests, fingerprinting itself. Fingerprinting, Galton wrote, would enable (superior) Europeans to distinguish between 'individual members of the swarms of dark- and yellow-skinned races' (quoted on p. 63). The development of a system of unique personal identifiers was achieved not by Galton himself, but by the Commissioner of Police in Bengal, Edward Henry. Fingerprinting was rapidly adopted by the Indian bureaucracy. Chapter 2 examines the consequences of Henry being seconded to the Witwatersrand in 1900–01 to create a new police force. Henry agreed with mine-owners that policing the Witwatersrand required a centralized registration system that allowed migrant labourers to be identified. The 'technology of fingerprint identification' was thus 'set … into the foundations of the South African state' (p. 76). In practice, universal fingerprinting proved too expensive at the time. Only the fingerprints of criminals and Chinese indentured labourers were fully catalogued. The state then turned to the Indian population of South Africa, prompting widespread resistance led by Gandhi. In Chapter 3, Breckenridge argues that it was his opposition to fingerprinting that led Gandhi to reject Western modernity. Chapter 4 turns to the failure of the state to register African people in the first half of the century; Breckenridge explains this in terms not of fiscal parsimony, but rather of the division within the state between advocates of fingerprinting (concerned with the regulation of labour and policing) and champions of the registration of births and deaths (concerned primarily with public health).

The compulsory fingerprinting of the male African population and centralized record keeping were finally undertaken in the 1950s, on Verwoerd's orders (see Chapter 5). An individual's residential, employment and even tax history would be recorded in a file matched to an identity document through fingerprinting. While apartheid is often viewed through the lens of effective, totalitarian surveillance and regulation, Breckenridge shows that the logistical challenge in fact proved too immense. Verwoerd's sudden embrace in the late 1950s of the idea of homeland independence may have been the result of the *failure* of his dream of an efficient, centralized system of surveillance, in that responsibility for the control of the African population would instead be decentralized to African subordinates. Chapter 6 takes the story through to the 2000s. The chapter begins with the non-biometric system of identification and registration introduced under the Population Registration Act, and partly computerized in the 1970s. In the 1980s, amidst heightened security anxieties, the government decided to fingerprint everyone (at least everyone outside the four notionally independent homelands) and to integrate its biometric and non-biometric registration systems. Unsurprisingly, this goal eluded not only the apartheid state but also its successor after 1994. The 'project of biometric citizenship' ended up being 'completed' through a different mechanism: the administration of cash transfers using 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.

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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