



Guest Lecture / Casual Lecture in African History

Keith Breckenridge

Biometric Capitalism: Infrastructures of Identification and Credit Surveillance on the African Continent

Keith Breckenridge is Professor and Deputy Director at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and one of the editors of the Journal of African History. He published widely on the cultural and economic history of South Africa. He is the author of *Biometric State: the Global Politics of Identification and Surveillance in South Africa, 1850 to Present* (Cambridge University Press 2014).

Within the scope of his lecture, Keith Breckenridge will argue that a new and distinctive type of capitalism is currently taking form on the African continent. States are being remade under the pressures of rapid demographic growth, persistent conflicts over boundaries, domestic and global national security demands, and the gifts of multi-lateral donors and international data-processing corporations. Much of this turn to enhanced forms of state surveillance is common to societies across the globe, but the economic and institutional forms on the African continent are unusual. Automated biometric identification systems, aimed chiefly at adults, present these states with apparently simple and cost-effective alternatives to the difficult and expensive projects of civil registration. This is especially the case because in many African countries – the lecture discusses Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria – commercial banks are offering to bear the costs of building centralised biometric population registers. In doing so they have explicitly in mind the development of an unusual combination of centralised national identification databases and commercial credit risk scoring apparatuses -- an informational union that aims to transform all citizens into appropriate subjects of automated biographical debt appraisal. In this lecture, he will try to establish whether biometric capitalism amounts to a new form of regulation, a geographical and institutional variety or an entirely new epoch or mode like the corporate rupture.

The lecture will be held in English on:

Tuesday, 27 June 2017, 6 p.m.
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
IGK Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History
Georgenstraße 23, 6th Floor, 10117 Berlin

Please RSVP at your earliest convenience to:
felicitas.hentschke@asa.hu-berlin.de

For additional information, please refer to: <http://rework.hu-berlin.de>



Postadresse
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
IGK Arbeit und Lebenslauf in
globalgeschichtlicher Perspektive
Unter den Linden 6
10099 Berlin

Besucheradresse
Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin
IGK Arbeit und Lebenslauf in
globalgeschichtlicher Perspektive
Georgenstr. 23
10117 Berlin
☎ ☑ Friedrichstr.

Telefon +49 (0)30 20 93 702-00
Fax +49 (0)30 20 93 702-10
E-Mail rework@asa.hu-berlin.de
Web <http://rework.hu-berlin.de>

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