# Biometric Marginality
## UID and the Shaping of Homeless Identities in the City

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Debates on India's Unique Identification Number project have so far been based on the analysis of economic data, emerging legal frameworks, policy procedure, and technology. This paper shifts the focus to examine the implementation of the UID project in sites of urban marginality. A study of homeless citizens demonstrates that the usages of UID have not shifted the goalposts but are developing along the lines of established citizen-state relationships in both the empowering and excluding dimensions of the UID. To capture the social impact of UID, debates must move beyond the notion that the transformative potential rests in technology or abstract policy and study the ways it is made available to people in their everyday life.

I n 2009, the Indian government adopted biometric registration (Unique Identification Number, UID) as a magic bullet that would provide poor and marginalised citizens with a means to accurately identify themselves before authorities of the state or the market.[1] By January 2013, 274 million Indians had been registered and vigorous debates about the merits and dangers of the project had polarised the public. But what are the effects of UID? How does it operate on the ground and what are its benefits for the poor? These questions address the emerging social effects of a new technology in the making. While we know lots about what the technology could do, is supposed to do, or is in danger of doing, so far there are few studies that investigate what actually happens during registration and usage in specific social spaces. This paper begins to address this gap through a case study in urban India. It traces the encounter of Delhi's homeless citizens with UID and the way they begin to navigate their relationship with the new technology.

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the position of poor citizens in India. While the government debates routes for securing inclusive growth (Planning Commission 2006), scholars have identified the disempowering effects of market-oriented policy. Urban spatial restructuring has attracted particular attention (Baviskar 2003, 2009; Ghertner 2010, 2011). Massive slum demolition and large-scale relocation projects have had severely disempowering effects on poor people (Rajagopal 2001), while also creating new forms of accommodation and resistance (Anjaria 2011; Appadurai 2000; Menon 2010). I was interested in those at the very fringes of urban life, who remain largely invisible not only to the state, but also to scholarship (Rao 2010). The homeless are one such community. They too have suffered from the gentrification of the urban space, something that became particularly obvious during deportation drives that prepared Delhi for the Commonwealth Games in 2010. Their marginalisation is permanent and profound, as evidenced by regular newspaper articles about structural and actual violence against those living on the streets (Pandit 2013; *Asian Age* 2013). Without a permanent address, homeless citizens have no valid identity, no access to state institutions or basic infrastructure, and remain outside the circuit of welfare distribution. Will e-governance become an effective intervention in their lives? Does UID deliver on its promise and make a currently invisible population visible to the welfare state and if so to which end? Will it empower a neglected population or increase surveillance?

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My questions are motivated by the promotion of biometric registration as a solution to "India's identity crisis". Policymakers argue that UID will render legible the population and thus create a solid basis for optimised, fair, and corruption-free service and welfare delivery. The Planning Commission (2010, 2012) promotes two immediate utilities for UID, both targeted at poor people. First, India seeks to extend its banking services to those unreached by it, so that they will be enabled to protect themselves from financial shocks by saving and accessing insurance. Second, the new system aims to promote inclusive growth by linking needy citizens directly to optimised government programmes through technology. It will enable efficient targeting of the needy, prevent corruption, and protect the system from users of incomplete, fake, or duplicate identities. There is plenty of criticism against such planning optimism. Social scientists point out that welfare delivery requires social data to determine eligibility.[2] Legal scholars warn against the perils of misuse of personal data, matching of databases, and privacy infringements. Social activists worry about the costs of a project with an uncertain outcome, and technicians doubt that the available technology can reliably handle the data of up to 1.2 billion people (Chander and Kush 2010; Dass 2011; Greenleaf 2010, 2011; Khera 2011; Ramanathan 2010).

This paper moves beyond such categorical appraisal of the biometric project and analyses the process of practical implementation. I follow Maringanti (2009) who makes it plain that UID will have empowering and surveillance potential. However, to know which these are and how they play out, we must study the "terrain of plausible action, the terrain on which citizens' transactions with the state and the market agencies occurs will change" (2009: 38). Maringanti is concerned with the role of administrative centralisation for the way power is imagined and exercised. I start from the other end, focusing not on the agents of change but the subjects of governance. How do people encounter, use, and appropriate the new technology in the process of adapting it to local environments? How is technology imagined, invented, and shaped when applied to concrete-life situations? My case focuses on urban struggles for inclusion and survival. However, before I introduce the homeless community in Delhi, I present a conceptual argument about the need for a more complex analysis of e-governance as shaped through multiple agencies and emerging technological affordances.

In India, much debate has taken place on social innovation through e-governance. Yet it focuses rather narrowly on the will to govern and the activities and plans of policymakers, while neglecting the crucial role of implementation. The first part engages critically with the fantasies of perfect control over money flows and social action that drives e-governance. Using insights from recent studies in the anthropology of states, I argue that we must move beyond conceptual debates about the possibilities/dangers afforded by technologies and study the contingent processes of appropriation. Only with a focus on implementation will we begin to comprehend how techniques and technology of governance turn into social tools and how they shape citizen-state relations. So far, sociological studies of biometric technology around the globe indicate that we are moving into a new era structured by a stringent in/out dualism that discriminates between disciplined and non-disciplined bodies (Fuller 2003). My case study is a contribution to this debate.

In the second part of my paper, I focus on urban marginality and trace the way inclusion and exclusion is experienced by homeless citizens of Delhi in the context of UID. I demonstrate that inclusion here is not a result of technological innovation, but the social engagement of specific actors who mediate a relationship between marginalised citizens and state institutions. The new technology is appropriated through the parameters of well-established state-citizen relations, confirming established patronage relations, and mimicking the role of documents. Once again we recognise that not papers or identity, but housing is at the core of urban crises of belonging. More importantly, we encounter a clash of two notions of identity, one tied to social standing and the other related to abstract constructions of physical uniqueness. UID's failure to promote inclusion is a result of its distance from socially relevant constructions of identity based on urban belonging, education, and relations. A shift in governance towards inclusive growth requires more than a new technology and a claim to universality. It requires new ways of making technologies of the state available, and novel non-discriminatory utilities for such technologies.

## Perfecting Governmentality

India's biometric project is a new effort to enhance the state's ability to direct populations through personalised support and surveillance. The programme embraces the notion that the state can and must guide the behaviour of its citizens to reach abstract development goals. Such planning partakes in a particular vision of the state as a capable organiser and facilitator of life. India strives towards perfecting governmentality. In Foucauldian sociology, governmentality refers to the activities of state institutions that aim to enhance the quality of life through the control of populations. The term biopolitics is used to refer to regulatory interventions that react to statistical representations of aggregated effects of collective behaviour. By making the social accessible for scrutiny, they enable the identification of issues for potential future policy interventions. Efficient implementation of regulatory regimes requires individual compliance. Ideally this is achieved through institutions that train individuals to self-discipline by directing an internalised gaze of power against their own selves. The goal of modern governance is to maximise such self-discipline of citizens as a means to enhance the efficiency of the government (Foucault et al 1991).[3]

Biometrics partakes in this vision of a state in control through administering a mixture of incentive and surveillance, which will persuade citizens to follow state directives and thus fulfil national targets. Initiatives for inclusive growth claim to open avenues for people living in the informal economy to enter institutions and regimes of the formal economy as a precondition for individual, collective, and national

prosperity. In the 1990s, India adopted stringent measures to liberalise its economy, restricting the activities of an inter-ventionist state. In the welfare sector, this means the country is progressively moving away from a broad approach to wel-fare that provides basic facilities and goods for survival to very deserving citizens. While governments continue to show strong commitment to large-scale welfare programmes, the goalposts for administering them are shifting. The aim is to use state resources in the most efficient way to empower citizens and put them on a trajectory for progressive economic advancement. Welfare is carefully targeted at the most needy or those expected to make the best use of state funding for sustainable empowerment. India Development Foundation Chairman Vijay Kelkar uses a metaphor to express this idea.

> To work up the ladder of income and achievement, it is necessary to first get on it, but the poor, the 'left behind', often find it difficult to get their hands on the bottom rung. Our approach must focus on giving the poor the tools to get on the ladder, and access the resources they need to move up and out of poverty (2010).

Such concern for individual progress through tailor-made schemes, together with neo-liberal concerns for efficiency, trans-parency, and auditing, has made the management of popula-tions and administration of welfare extremely complex. Many current schemes require extensive social data for determining eligibility as well as frequent identification for tracking progress. UID in combination with social databases is expected to provide such utilities. The technology is expected to ease the manage-ment of illiterate itinerant populations because it is paperless, mobile, and instantaneous. Machines are deployed to "objec-tively" identify individuals at any place and any time for the pur-pose of including or excluding them from particular activities or benefits. It will record the flow of money from state institutions to citizens and thus become a safeguard against corruption and embezzlement. The proponents of UID purposefully downplay the complications that emerge during assessments of eligibility for social security. Critiques have frequently remarked that the linking of biometrics with social data raises serious questions of rights to privacy, data safety, and security (Greenleaf 2010, 2011). Here, I am not concerned with the latter problem. My focus is on biometric technology itself and the way it resists a life along the lines of the purpose it was designed to fulfil.

The notion that states effectively direct the behaviour of citizens has of course always been more of a fantasy than an empirical fact (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). In recent years, a proliferating number of studies have focused on the complex-ity of states and established that they are not unified and coher-ent entities, but made up of a multiplicity of institutions, inten-tions, and performances (Das and Poole 2004; Hansen and Stepputat 2001). Governance is an open-ended social process saturated with negotiations that creates multiple effects and many unintended consequences (Li 2007; Scott 1998; Rao 2010). Ferguson (2006) famously argued that the expansion of bureaucratic institutions in developing nations has not en-hanced the control of "states" or improved their ability to de-liver "their" goals. Instead, it has multiplied the nodal points at which power is exercised and at which state-citizens relations

are formed and must be negotiated. Gupta's (2012) recent study of rural development projects in India argues about a re-versal in the effect of poverty alleviation programmes. The lack of effective coordination and absence of strong common goals between various power brokers leads not to empowerment, but aggravates social neglect. Class arrogance, social indifference, and corruption perpetuate a negative relation between poor citizens and the bureaucracy and advance marginalisation. Such critical analysis is a warning against the premature optimism that the new technology will solve such a complex und multi-layered problem as poverty. This is not to dismiss biometrics as ineffective, or claim that any effort for improving citizen-state communication is doomed to fail.

## New Habits of Technology

I argue that biometrics is not a neutral technology, but an emerg-ing technique that forms at the conjunction between machines, biological bodies, social habits, and their contexts. Rather than assume that technology addresses the problem it was designed to solve, we must follow the new habits that become attached to this technology. How does it change the experience of being poor in India and how does it intervene in the relation between citizens and state institutions? Till date we know very little about the impact of biometric technology on social relations. A series of studies on e-borders demonstrates that the emergent technology shifts governance towards a greater emphasis on po-licing strategic entry points. E-gates protect and enhance the freedom of people who are trusted to exhibit appropriate habits permitted and required in spaces of regulated sociality. In turn, those whose activities and desires are perceived as burdensome, unattractive, or destructive, are forced to stay outside (Epstein 2007; Fuller 2003). Ajana (2012) provides a compelling exam-ple of the way the Iris Recognition Immigration System "widens the gap" (Home Office 2008: 48, in Ajana 2012: 859) between welcome travellers and unwanted immigrants in the UK border zone. Those who have volunteered their biometric data and es-tablished their status as trusted persons and desirable subjects can move hassle-free through electronic portals bypassing lengthy immigration queues. The pre-selection directs the atten-tion of officers to "difficult" cases, enhancing airport efficiency and the watch on persons declared illegal.

In contrast to this discriminatory logic, India's UID project prides itself to be inclusive and universal. It does not aim to deter disadvantaged citizens from entering spaces of affluence, but seeks to open up participation in the official economy to all and provide easy access to welfare. However, like e-passports, it permits the participation only of those who pass the "gate", whose bodies have been registered and rendered legible in the systems of the state. Here emerges the inseparable link between social and biometric profiling and the contemporary tendency towards responsibilisation. Biometric technology is a particular way of knowing individuals for the purpose of engi-neering collectives. Technology is programmed to recognise mainstreamed bodies, creating social distinctions at two levels. There is the differentiation between enrolled and non-enrolled (or un-enrollable) persons that renders the latter group outside

the realm of legitimising knowledge, and as such categorically suspicious (Maguire 2009: 13). The basic in/out dualism of biometric checking further engineers contextual identities of belonging/non-belonging that link into established identifications of race, class, gender, or age (Fuller 2003).

Such checking aims to enhance the efficiency of state spending by potentially opening up avenues for efficiently sorting bodies according to their suitability and eligibility for support. Moreover, easy surveillance should prevent beneficiaries from using allocated resources in non-prescribed ways. This approach, hailed as an anti-corruption measure, assumes that compliance with state instructions is always possible and the most effective road to empowerment. In view of evidence from development practice, such optimism must be questioned (Sharma 2008; Gupta 2012; Rao 2010). The following case study elaborates the need for improvisation as a crucial ingredient for survival at the bottom end of the social hierarchy. I demonstrate that the inclusion of the homeless in biometric data banks and new schemes is not a result of automated recognition through well-functioning computers. It is achieved through a mixture of patronage, luck, and self-discipline. Biometric registration offers no pedagogy of life and does not help citizens – those who manage to register – to comprehend what the government has to offer. A combination of mediation, elaboration, and improvisation is the glue that creates chains for linking computers to citizens, citizens to institutions, and past struggles to future opportunities.

## Biometric Experiments

My study is located among the very marginal of Delhi. I wanted to know whether e-governance changes their life reality. To find out, I accompanied social workers providing services to the homeless for six months during 2010 and 2012.[4] I quickly grasped that – like everywhere in the world – the lack of a home produces multiple disadvantages. Homeless citizens suffered not just the absence of shelter and access to basic facilities such as toilets, water or schooling for their children, but – due to the lack of an address – remained invisible to the welfare state while being hyper-visible to the police. During an extensive survey, it was found that there were 72,854 citizens living on the streets of Delhi, of which two-thirds had arrived more than five years ago, which should theoretically make them eligible for social security schemes. To improve their legal status, all survey participants were given specially-designed homeless ID cards, which use Delhi's regular sleeping places as residential addresses. These cards cannot be used as "proofs of nationality or domicile". Yet, as official documents, they facilitate further legitimisation. It is here that my UID research took off.

Like all government schemes, UID enrolment does not start from scratch. Entry depends on prior registration, proved at the enrolment station by showing a passport, driving licence, voter identity card, tax statement, or any other permitted document.[5] If documents are unavailable, "residents may also take the help of Introducers available at the enrolment centre. The Introducers are notified by the Registrar."[6] In our case, Homeless Service functioned as introducers for all those registered in their database. "What happens if homeless persons missed the survey or lost their cards? Can they still sign up for UID?" I asked Ranu, a responsible social worker at Homeless Service. "If we can trace their record, we can issue a new ID card, but we can't stand in for people not captured in the system. Besides, how would we know where to find them to deliver the UID registration letter?" While established citizens with documents can easily be absorbed into the new bureaucratic system, marginalised people depend on patronage. This dualism mimics the split of Indian society into political and civil society (Chatterjee 2004). A new technology of governing spreads through social networks that reaffirm established patronage relations and posits prior recognition in the systems of power as a precondition for inclusion in the system.

Those who passed the identity test moved to registration. I surveyed three enrolment stations in the poor neighbourhoods of East Delhi. At all three places, I met young technicians who hoped to use the job as a stepping stone to careers as IT professionals. They were visibly put off by the task of sitting in a dingy room in a place of social neglect, surrounded by debris, flies, and stink. There were also regular power cuts typical of labour-class neighbourhoods. The reality of their workplace was a far cry from the image of the job they had in mind. They were not sophisticated technicians handling advanced computer technology at a distance from the social body. Instead they found themselves forced to adopt a hands-on approach, and twist and turn the uncouth bodies of homeless citizens to create decent data sets. The fingers of labourers were a never-ending source of annoyance. Lost fingers, damaged fingertips, and rubbed-off skin contours made fingerprints unrecognisable to a system that posits healthy, young bodies as the norm. Age, exposure to nature, and hard manual labour had worn off those marks that were perceived as infallible signs of physical individuality. The first effort at encoding usually failed.[7] Enrollers became imaginative and developed tricks to read fingers that resisted instant transparency. A wet towel was passed from person to person. "Rub your hands more strongly" they would repeat up to five times to produce a sufficiently detailed reading. Persons with damaged hands had to wait for a specially authorised enroller, who could certify their disabled status, to arrive. The person never showed up. All those bearing the marks of the high-risk construction industry in the form of deep scars, severed fingers, or mutilated hands remained excluded.

The challenge of gender was of a different order. Women had little issue with fingerprints. Their predicament was less physical and more habitual. Many women could not get their photographs and iris scans right. Trained to lower their gazes or veil their faces in an act of modesty, they were uncomfortable when staring straight into the light of a camera. Their bodies resisted the humiliation of this form of unveiling, and they resisted the intrusion of the deep gaze by blinking and producing streams of tears. A box of tissues and the authoritarian hands of enrollers, which held heads and disciplined nervous eyelids, helped the process roll on. Sometimes a young unmarried

sister-in-law was called to cover up for a newly married and shy *bahu* (daughter-in-law) who could not be entrusted to the crude hands of young unrelated males. Tireless repetition, substitutes, and the acceptance of a high error rate became pragmatic solutions that folded deviant bodies into an electronic system of recognition.

## Class Prejudice

The process of enrolling homeless citizens in a system that claims technological neutrality and distance from any process of social classification became a humiliating display of the labour class' unfitness for participation in the electronic age, affording a spectacular demonstration of class hierarchy. Introducers from Homeless Service regularly complained that enrollers were not socially competent and behaved rudely towards homeless citizens. Enrollers did not think that they needed social skills. They were employed as IT specialists and had no inclination to consider their computers impotent. Instead, they blamed misreading on the "dirty" bodies of "inferior" citizens. This rearticulation of class prejudice in biometric registration is reminiscent of experiences of race in the US.[8] In North America, user manuals warn operators about the chances of high failure rates when recording dark-skinned people and Asian fingerprints (Pugliese 2005). Misreading is a by-product of a specific programming bias that measures bodies in relation to a normalised template that sorts bodies into typical and atypical. Individuality in the new electronic age is recognised when it appears as a legible variation of the defined norm for electronic capture. In the course of capturing Delhi's homeless population, the unique signature of the working-class body was erased through machines that posed healthy middle-class bodies as the norm. Vulnerable bodies that bore the marks of a harsh life on the streets were replaced by an approximation to the standard body of citizenship, a system that bears the seed for future discrimination against all those who do not fit into the electronic mould of "middle-class machines".

Those who were registered could move on to explore the potential of their new status as authorised bodies. Banking became an immediate opportunity because, unlike welfare schemes, it did not depend on establishing an entitlement. The Planning Commission (2010: iii) explicitly argues that one purpose of UID is to "help poor residents easily establish their identity to banks. As a result, banks will be able to scale up their branch-less banking deployments and reach out to a wider population at lower costs." What was the practical salience of this viewpoint for poor citizens? Ranu from Homeless Service was cynical. "Since a year I have been visiting banks. They keep telling us that it is not mandatory for a bank to accept UID as a basis for opening a bank account. Even national banks are unwilling to help homeless citizens acquire no-frills accounts.[9] Weren't these made for the very purpose of integrating marginalised people into the official economy?" Indeed, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) invented the no-frills account for poor citizens in 2005.

> With a view to achieving the objective of greater financial inclusion, all banks should make available a basic banking 'no-frills' account either with 'nil' or very low minimum balance as well as charges that would make such accounts accessible to vast sections of population. … All banks should also give wide publicity to the facility of such a 'no-frills' account including on their websites indicating the facilities and charges in a transparent manner.[10]

In May 2012, Sema and I decided to follow up on homeless banking. Our first point of contact was the manager of the Old Delhi branch of Business Bank. He explained that a new customer would have to be introduced by a current account holder, provide a signature, and present a photo ID with address. Inofficial sleeping places did not count as address proof, nor did a UID registration that mentions no proper address. "We need an address for the purpose of correspondence", the officer asserted. We asked, "What about a village address? Homeless citizens could submit their hometown address. Would that suffice?" The officer remained unmoved and explained patiently that a Delhi branch caters to Delhi residents and the homeless were not legitimate, registered, or authorised urban settlers. We tried for another half an hour and then took leave.

## Meaning of Identity

Our conversation with the bank manager illustrated an obvious collision of two meanings of the term identity. While the UID authority uses the term in the very narrow sense of accounting for physical uniqueness, corporate managers are concerned with social standing, trust, and desirability of a relation. Identity in this sociological sense is based on social classifications that cast the homeless as unattractive customers, based on expectations about their behaviour. Yet, not all efforts at banking were unsuccessful. Further inquiry took me to the Social Bank near one of Delhi's permanent homeless shelters. Here the manager generously opened no-frills accounts for all who held homeless ID cards. The bank was not concerned with UID but relied on registration with Homeless Service. Its representative, Mohammad, vouched for the homeless customers and trained them in the activity of saving.

> It is difficult to convince people to trust banks and consider that their money is safe and does not get swallowed up, like it can happen when they give it to a rich businessman to look after, who might run away with it. I have to explain a lot at night when we sit in groups. Sometimes I also put pressure and coax people into saving by telling them that the bank is getting annoyed with their slack attitude and threatening to close their accounts (Interview on 29 June 2012).

Through Mohammad's efforts, 500 homeless citizens had opened accounts in the Social Bank. He regretted that only 100 of these were active and just 10 operated their accounts regularly. The financial incentive for him as business consultant, who earned 2% from each transaction, was slim. The bank too admitted that with 400 empty accounts and 100 with savings between Rs 100 and Rs 800 the scheme was not exactly a financial success. Clearly more is required for social inclusion than technological innovation. Technology offers no pedagogy of life. Biometrics can discriminate between compliant and non-compliant bodies on the basis of programmed codes, but cannot establish trust, teach the logic of banking, or provide incentives for investing in the formal economy.

Why then did homeless citizens sign up for UID, if banking was no priority? My queries produced different variations of the following dialogue.

> Ursula: "Why did you enrol in UID?"
> Raju: "We will get an identity card."
> Ursula: "How does that help?"
> Raju: "The police won't harass us."
> Ursula: "What else can you do with the card?"
> Raju: "I don't know. You tell me."

The answers point to an open future and the usefulness of possessing an "ID card", especially when confronted with the penalising state. When I presented this finding to policymakers or academics, I was frequently corrected. "The UID is not an ID card but a number that is linked to personal biometric data". Users were not particularly concerned with these official proclamations. They reinterpreted the UID message. And why not? They received a UID letter with a detachable section – the size of a credit card – with their name, photo, address, and UID number. It looked like an ID card and could be used as such, as homeless citizens learnt during their frequent unfriendly encounters with night police patrols. Homeless citizens began to invent utilities for biometric registration on the basis of the established parameters of state-citizen relations. It worked instantly, because it required no computer or electricity, no certificate of eligibility, or any other document of authorisation. Social acceptance was instantaneous and based on the assumption that registered bodies must be authorised bodies.

## New Technologies, Old Utilities

In this paper, I traced the social life of UID among the homeless population of Delhi. While the sample of this case study was small, it is of particular significance because it captures a key target group of e-governance. Homeless citizens suffer from multiple disadvantages not least because of their lack of an address. As a mobile device for secure identification of itinerant populations, UID was to remedy this situation. It is obvious that the hope for an improved life situation through e-governance is unfounded in a context where a valid local address remains a necessary prerequisite for any service. However, the complications UID faces on the ground are not merely a result of an incomplete transition towards new modes of governance that abstain from punishing mobility. They are not just a result of incomplete design, but emerge in the encounter between technology and an extremely heterogeneous population. I have recorded the challenges produced by cultural bodies, some of which were unreadable by machines programmed to assume a particular universal biology. Added to these errors are the difficulties at the level of usage, where crass educational, social, and economic inequalities produce huge variances in the utilities of the new tool. Urban banks showed no interest in a registration devoid of positive social classification. However, this did not render UID registration useless for homeless citizens, who were little concerned whether the new technologies functioned according to a plan, of which they were ignorant. They tried the card and were delighted to find out that it could protect them from police atrocities.

This case of technological co-creation resonates with recent discussions in the social science literature on "affordance" (Bloomfield et al 2010; Pfaffenberger 1992). Turner (2005) argues importantly that the affordance of an object is not something inherent to the object itself, something that needs to be discovered, "but cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective. ... It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer" (2005: 790; Gibson 1986: 129). Most discussions of the potential and dangers of UID treat biometric registration as a complex object defined by technology, law, and policy intention. Here I demonstrated that UID exceeds these contexts. It is co-created in practice. As such, it falls short of a revolution. Rather than producing new forms of visibility – whether empowering or repressive – UID becomes enmeshed with, supplements, and completes older forms of authorisation through documents and personal recommendations. It reads and integrates individuals sufficiently adjusted to a mainstream social and biological body. Class distinctions remain the most crucial structuring device. Social status determines where and when UID is useful for whom, how easily it is available, how reliably it will function, and whether citizens can correct their data.[11] Homeless citizens could bridge the gap only by reaching up through established hierarchies of patronage. So far there is no indication that the trajectory of the UID is different from that of prior schemes that reached out to the poor, such as the "V P Singh token", the below poverty line (BPL) ration card, or occasional surveys. Those with a low status or lack of relations will remain petitioners perpetually waiting for the next "camp" that will make registration or correction available.

There is one added complication. It is the claim to universality, which, if maintained, will in unprecedented ways make suspicious all those who are not captured adequately in the new system, and thus augment the discrimination against vulnerable and marginal bodies. The optimistic pronouncement that biometric registration is a "game changer" betrays a naïve reading of affordances as resting in technology itself. However, shifts in governance require more than new technologies and claims to universality. I demonstrated the learning that takes place in a new technological environment. UID enrolments, identification procedures, and saving schemes necessitate patient input if they are supposed to be successful. Such learning must mutually feed back into the system of governance for technology to become socially useful. Only then would we move beyond a naïve celebration of technology towards a new pedagogical approach of learning for development.

## NOTES

1 The UID is a randomly generated 12-digit Unique Identification Number issued by the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI, also known by its new name, the National Identification Authority of India, or NIAI). The number is stored in a central data bank and linked to a person's biometric data – fingerprints, iris scan data and photograph.

2 The Planning Commission (2012) acknowledges that determining service entitlement is a process separate from identification. NIAI documents do not offer a separate discussion on the predicaments of determining eligibility. Identification figures as a root service that forms the basis for various social tasks. It figures as technology that is socially neutral because it exists prior to any social classification for which it might subsequently be used.

3 For a summary of the anthropological debate, see Inda (2008).

4 All names of persons and institutions have been changed to protect the anonymity of informants.

5 http://uidai.gov.in/images/FrontPageUpdates/valid_documents_list.pdf, accessed on 28 October 2012.

6 http://uidai.gov.in/how-to-enrol-for-aadhaar. html, accessed on 17 August 2012.

7 Expert evidence to the Lok Sabha's standing committee is consistent with this experience. R Ramakumar said, "It has been proven again and again that in the Indian environment the failure to enrol with fingerprints is as high as 15% due to the prevalence of a huge population dependent on manual labour" (Standing Committee on Finance 2011: 11).

8 Maguire (2009, 2012) elaborates the historical relation biometric technology has had with radicalised systems of knowledge. He recounts the unsuccessful efforts of imperial scientists to define rules for recognising race through fingerprints, a programme that was driven by the desire to use biometric measures to achieve social classification. The ultimate triumph of biometric technology promotes an ideology of individualism that stands in contrast to the belief in racial determinism of evolutionist science. Maguire describes the achievement of the French police officer and biometric researcher Alphonse Bertillon as the discovery that "recoding the body's markers, normally common to all, in sufficient detail ...renders them specific to one" (2009: 12). Biometric registration became a function of governing collectives through recognising individuals. Yet, it never fully cast off the spectre of racism. Recent examples are electronic systems for face recognition and fingerprinting. The template affirms the superiority of the white body by turning all other biological forms into low-quality deviations from the ideal type. This discriminatory logic is replicated in the UID project through the prism of class.

9 No-frills accounts allow people to save and withdraw up to Rs 50,000.

10 RBI document, DBOD No Leg BC 18/ 09.07. 006/2011-12, 1 July 2011, http://rbidocs.rbi.org. in/rdocs/notification/PDFs/56LD300611FL.pdf, accessed on 20 August 2012. In 2012, the term no-frills account was replaced by "basic saving account" to avoid negative stereotyping (The *Economic Times* 2012, *Business Standard* 2012).

11 I found McClain and Mears (2012) on free samples particularly helpful to grasp the class distinction afforded by technologies of the state. Freebies are markers of class, since it separates those who are affluent enough to receive them for free as recognition of their status and an expression of trust and investment from those who must argue and request for free samples. They mark those who *receive* them from those who must *retrieve* them.

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