



CENTRE FOR ASIAN AND
TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

SOUTH ASIA
INSTITUTE



UNIVERSITÄT
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Lecture Series on Governance and Politics in South Asia

Department of Political Science

Special Lecture on

Identifying 1.3 billion Indians biometrically: corporate world, state, and civil society

by

Dr Nicolas Belorgey and Prof Christophe Jaffrelot

In 2009, India embarked on a scheme for the biometric identification of its people. This project was conceived by IT companies based in Bengaluru. The programme's main architect, Nandan Nilekani, was in fact the head of one of these firms. The idea behind the project was to use digital technology – and the data it enables to collect – for economic ends. But to register the entire Indian population, the State had to be persuaded to be involved in the project, later named as "Aadhaar". The rationale that secured the government's engagement was financial: using Aadhaar would help disburse aid to the poor while minimising "leakages" caused by corruption and duplicates among beneficiaries. Yet, possessing an Aadhaar number gradually became necessary for a number of other things, too, including tax payment. When approached to rule on this matter, the Supreme Court dragged its feet and did not seek to decisively protect people's privacy. As for the avowed aim of the scheme itself, Aadhaar did not improve the quality of the services rendered to the poor and its economic impact, too, remains to be proven, even if operators who believe that "data is the new oil" consider benefits in a long-term perspective.



Dr Nicolas Belorgey is a CNRS research fellow, author of the book *L'hôpital sous pression* (La Découverte, 2011) dedicated to the on-going transformation of hospitals under the New Public Management, and of many peer-reviewed articles. He is currently preparing a book on the unique ID in India, Aadhaar.



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Date: Monday, June 28, 2021

Time: 14:00 – 16:00, CEST

Online - Via Zoom

Meeting id: 812 5314 7896, Pass code: TheoryM21

Zoom link- <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81253147896?pwd=RE1HUIFtYmRrczVkUW9Lbi9pS3E4Zz09>