Research Profile

Interdisciplinary tech and migration researcher with 10+ years of experience in East Africa, working at intersection of science and technology (STS) studies, migration studies, and critical race studies. Studying impacts of digital identity/biometric systems on migrants, refugees, and people at the political margins. Skilled in a variety of research methods including ethnographic fieldwork in cross-cultural, multilingual settings.

Professional Appointments

**Queen Mary University of London**

-Senior Lecturer, School of Politics and International Relations; Fellow, Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences — September 2022-present

**Reviews Editor, *Africa* (Cambridge University Press)**, the International Africa Institute, hosted by SOAS — July 2021-present

**London School of Economics**

-Visiting Fellow, Firoz Lalji Centre for Africa — August 2019-present

**University College London**

-Lecturer (Teaching), History Department and Visiting Research Fellow, Institute of Advanced Studies — October 2020-present

-Teaching Fellow, Institute of Advanced Studies and History Department — September 2017-October 2020

**University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia**

-Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Africana Studies — July 2016-June 2017

-Lecturer, The Joseph H. Lauder Institute of Management and International Studies and the Department of History— June 2015-July 2016

-Summer Regional Program Director for Africa, The Lauder Institute — Summer 2016

-Postdoctoral Researcher, The Lauder Institute and the Department of History — June 2013-June 2015

EDUCATION

Stanford University, Stanford, California

PhD in African History — June 2013

MA in African History — June 2010

Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri

BA in History — May 2005, *Summa cum laude*

LANGUAGES

Advanced: Swahili; Intermediate: SomaliandFrench; Elementary: Hebrew

PUBLICATIONS

**Book Projects**

*Biometrics from the Margins: How Fingerprinting Shaped Kenya* (in progress)

*The Other Climate Technology: Biometrics, Degrowth, and Post-Carbon Futures* (in progress)

*We Do Not Have Borders: Greater Somalia and the Predicaments of Belonging in Kenya*, New African Histories series (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2017). Finalist for the 2018 African Studies Association book prize for best scholarly work on Africa.

**Articles and Book Chapters**

Alden Young and Keren Weitzberg. ‘Globalizing Racism and De-provincializing Muslim Africa. *Modern Intellectual History* 19, no. 3 (May 2021): 912-33.

Keren Weitzberg, Margie Cheesman, Aaron Martin, and Emrys Shoemaker. ‘Beyond Surveillance and Recognition: Rethinking Digital Identity in Aid.’ *Big Data and Society* 8, no. 1(1 April 2021).

‘Biometrics, Race Making, and White Exceptionalism: The Controversy Over Universal Fingerprinting in Post-World War II Kenya.’ *The Journal of African History* 61, no. 1 (March 2020): 23-43.

Co-author/participant ‘AHR Conversation: Walls, Boundaries and Borders.’ *American Historical Review* 122, no. 5 (December 2017): 1501-1503.

‘Rethinking the “Shifta War” Fifty Years After Independence: Myth, Memory, and Marginalization.’ In *Kenya at Fifty: History, Policy, Politic*s, eds. Michael M. Kithinji, Mickie M. Koster, and Jerono P. Rotich. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

‘Unaccountable Census: Colonial Enumeration and Its Implications for the Somali People of Kenya.’ *The Journal of African History* 56, no. 3 (November 2015): 409-428.

**Reports for Civil Society Groups:**

‘A Very British Problem: The Evolution of Britain’s Militarized Industrial Complex.’ Report for Campaign Against the Arms Trade (4 August 2022), [https://caat.org.uk/publications/a-very-british-problem-the-evolution-of-britains-militarised-policing-industrial-complex](https://caat.org.uk/publications/a-very-british-problem-the-evolution-of-britains-militarised-policing-industrial-complex/).

‘Biometrics Collection Under the Pretext of Counter-Terrorism: Case Study of Israel/Palestine and Case Study of Somalia.’ Reports for Privacy International. 28 May 2021, <https://privacyinternational.org/long-read/4528/biometrics-collection-under-pretext-counter-terrorism>.

(Forthcoming) ‘Defending the Rights of Refugees and Migrants in the Digital Age.’ Co-authored with Roya Pakzad. Report for Amnesty International.

**Select Online Work and Public Engagement:**

My research has received coverage in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune, Quartz Africa*, and the BBC World Service.

Aaron Martin, Emrys Shoemaker, Keren Weitzberg, and Margie Cheesman. ‘Researching Digital Identity in Times of Crisis.’ Workshop Report for the Alan Turing Institute. August 2021, <https://www.turing.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/3c_workshop_reporttimes_of_crisis_.pdf>.

‘Gateway or Barrier? The Contested Politics of Humanitarian Biometrics. *Datafication and Digital Rights* (blog). 12 January 2021, <https://datarightsafrica.org/gateway-or-barrier-the-contested-politics-of-humanitarian-biometrics>.

‘Passing as a Refugee.’ Africa is a Country. 10 November 2020, <https://africasacountry.com/2020/11/passing-as-a-refugee>.

‘Machine-Readable Refugees.’ London Review of Books Blog. 14 September 2020, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/blog/2020/september/machine-readable-refugees>.

‘Countries Around the World are Using Border Surveillance Systems Against their Own Citizens.’ *The Conversation*. 17 August 2020, <https://theconversation.com/countries-around-the-world-are-using-border-surveillance-systems-against-their-own-citizens-144399>.

‘In Kenya, You Cannot Go Anywhere Without an ID. I Don’t Have One.’ *Mail & Guardian.* 13 April 2020,[https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-04-13-in-kenya-you-cannot-go-anywhere-without-an-id-i-dont-have-one](https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-04-13-in-kenya-you-cannot-go-anywhere-without-an-id-i-dont-have-one/).

‘Mobile Credit Expands Mass Surveillance of Ordinary Kenyans.’ *Coda Story*. 11 September 2019, <https://codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/mobile-credit-kenya/>.

‘Kenya’s Controversial Biometric Project is Shrouded in Secrecy.’ *Coda Story*. 3 May 2019, <https://codastory.com/authoritarian-tech/kenya-biometric-project-shrouded-insecrecy>.

‘Instead of Building a Big, Beautiful Wall, We Should Rethink Our Idea of Borders.’ *The Washington Post*. Made By History section. 11 August 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/08/11/instead-of-building-a-bigbeautiful-wall-we-should-rethink-our-idea-of-borders](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/made-by-history/wp/2017/08/11/instead-of-building-a-bigbeautiful-wall-we-should-rethink-our-idea-of-borders/).

**Public Art Projects:**

H is for Hostile Environment (2022). Trailer: <https://chisenhale.org.uk/event/h-is-for-hostile-environment>.

RECENT COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

**Privacy International Grant, ‘Safeguarding Dignity, Identity and Identification,’** working with Haki na Sheria on research and advocacy around digital ID systems in Kenya.

**Alan Turing Institute Trusted Digital Infrastructure for Development Research Project**. Grant recipient and member of Technical Working Group.

**Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)/Facebook Ethics in AI Research Initiative for Africa** with Radha Upadhyaya (Institute of Development Studies, University of Nairobi) and Linda Bonyo (Kenya Lawyers Hub). Collaborative research project on ‘The Ethics and Social Impact of Automated Mobile Credit Lending in Kenya’.

**Amnesty International Consultancy Project: Defending the Rights of Refugees and Migrants in the Digital Age**.

**H is for Hostile Environment:** Moving-image work on digital surveillance and asylum seeking in East London, produced in collaboration with artist Edwin Mingard. Funded by the UCL Trellis: Public Art programme and Arts Council England.

**UKRI GCRF Digital Innovation for Development in Africa (DIDA)** Research Network on datafication in East Africa.

RECENT GRANTS, FELLOWSHIPS & HONOuRS

**Runner-Up for the Omidyar Network 2021 #GoodID Awards** — August 2021

**Re-granting by Privacy International/OSF for ‘Safeguarding Dignity, Identity and Identification’ project (**£17,100) — June 2021

**Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC)/Facebook Ethics in AI Research Initiative for Africa co-awardee (**$25,000)— October 2020

**Arts Council England Project Grant co-awardee (**£15,000)— October 2020

**Selection Committee Member for the Omidyar Network #GoodID Awards** — Sept. 2020

**The Alan Turing Institute ‘Trusted Digital Infrastructure for Development’ research award (**£17,176)— July 2020

**UCL Trellis: Public Art Programme awardee (**£19,000) — July 2020

**UKRI GCRF Digital Innovation for Development in Africa (DIDA) Research Network** —March 2020

**Tier 1 (Global Talent) Visa Recipient (endorsed by British Academy)** — February 2020

**Privacy International/Open Society Foundations (OSF) Grant on ‘Safeguarding Dignity, Identity and Identification’ (**£19,290**)** — Oct. 2019

**Africa and Middle East Teaching Fund,** University College London **(**£2000) — June 2019

**2019-20 Fulbright US Scholar Award** ($40,000) — April 2019

**2019-20 American Academy of Learned Societies Fellowship** ($40,000)— March 2019

**Honorable Mention, 2018 Melville J. Herskovits Prize (African Studies Association Book Prize) for best scholarly work on Africa** — November 2018

**British Academy/Leverhulme Small Research Grant (**£10,000) — September 2018

***We Do Not Have Borders*** featured in *The Washington Post*’s Monkey Cage blog — 3 August 2018

**UCL Global Engagement Funds**, University College London (£4,000) — July 2018

***We Do Not Have Borders*** named one of *Quartz Africa*’s favorite Africa books of 2017 — 27 Dec. 2017

**Thematic Research Grant,** The British Institute in Eastern Africa (£2,500) — August 2017

**Mellon Foundation Dissertation Fellowship**, Stanford University — 2012-13

RECENT CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS, & PRESENTATIONS

**Invited Speaker, ‘Machine-Readable Refugees: Navigating Biometric Systems in Kenya.’** University of Oxford Refugee Studies Centre(online)— 2 February 2022.

**Invited Discussant, *Colloque PIAF - Identification et citoyenneté en* Afrique,** SciencesPo, Le Centre de recherches internationales(online)— 9 September 2021.

**Invited Speaker. ‘Mobility, Sovereignty, and Biometrics in Northeast Africa.’ Foreign Service Institute, United States Department of State** (online)— 31 August 2021.

**Invited Speaker. ‘Digital Lending & Identity and Data Privacy.’** **Masterclass with Radha Upadhyaya**, Africa Law Tech Festival 2021(online) — 8 July 2021.

**Co-organizer. Workshop on ‘Researching Digital Identity in Times of Crisis’.** TheAlan Turing Institute (online) — 24 May 2021. Workshop Report: <https://www.turing.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2021-08/3c_workshop_reporttimes_of_crisis_.pdf>.

**Invited Panelist.‘Biometrics, Race Making, and White Exceptionalism: The Controversy Over Universal Fingerprinting in Kenya.’** History of Forensics Workshop, UC Hastings, San Francisco (online) — 19 & 26 March 2021.

**Diane Joyce, Shiv Aggarwal, Dia Banerji, Lisa Lyon, and Keren Weitzberg. ‘Designing an Inclusive Identity System…Regardless of Accessibility, Age, Ethnicity or Gender.’** Identity Futures 2020 (webinar) — 23 November 2021.

**Linda Bonyo, Rosemary Okello-Oriale, and Keren Weitzberg. Datafication and Digital Rights in East Africa** (webinar)— 29 October 2020.

**Janet Roitman, Jeremy Adelman, David Sepkoski, Keren Weitzberg, AbdouMaliq Simone. ‘The Concept of Crisis.’** Edinburgh Centre for the Study of Modern and Contemporary History (webinar) — 29 September 2020.

**Teki Akuetteh Falconer, James Flint, and Keren Weitzberg. #GoodID and Contact Tracing.** Twitter chat convened by the Omidyar Network — 24 June 2020.

**Emma Lindley, Debbie Reynolds, and Keren Weitzberg. ‘Biometrics, Privacy and Exclusion.’** Women in Identity **(**webinar) — 12 June 2020.

**Yussuf Bashir, Gus Hossein, and Keren Weitzberg. ‘The Trouble with Identity in Kenya.’ The Technology Pill** (podcast) — 12 June 2020.

**Invited Panelist. ‘ID Troubles in Nairobi: Vetting, Double Registration, and Making and Marketing of Reputational Histories**.**’** Rethinking Refuge: Processes of Refuge Seeking. Forum Transregionale Studien, Berlin — 6-7 June 2019.

**Co-Organizer and Panelist. Bridging the Divide between African Diaspora Studies and African Studies: A Critical Workshop**, funded by the UCL Global Engagement Office, with keynote by Prof. Paul Gilroy. Institute of Advanced Studies, UCL— 11 January 2018.

**Panelist. ‘Stateless Citizens?: Irredentism, Repression, and Political Membership on the Kenyan/Somali Borderlands**.’ Those Left Behind: Statelessness and the Consolidation of National Territoriality. Association for Borderlands Studies World Conference, Vienna/Budapest — July 11, 2018.

**Book talks:** Between 2017-2018, I was invited to give talks on *We Do Not Have Borders* at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS); The Rift Valley Institute in Nairobi; Oxford University; the University of Bristol; Columbia University; New York University Abu Dhabi; the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology; and Drexel University.

TEACHING & STUDY ABROAD EXPERIENCE

**Study Abroad Program Administration:**

**Summer Regional Program Director for Africa for the Lauder Institute:** Traveled to South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya, Mauritius, Madagascar, Mozambique, and Ethiopia to conduct research on potential study-abroad programs and forge institutional links with African partners. Led an inaugural 8-week immersion in Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa for joint MBA/MA students in International Studies in summer 2016. **Co-instructor of inaugural Penn Global Seminar:** Taught undergraduate course with embedded study-abroad component; Designed and led one-week immersion in Zanzibar.

**Teaching:**

Taught undergraduate, MA, and PhD courses at Stanford University, the University of Pennsylvania, and University College London. Advised MA, PhD and dual-degree MBA/MA candidates at the University of Pennsylvania and University College London. Served as external examiner for a PhD candidate at the Refugee Studies Centre at Oxford University. Prior to graduate school, taught ninth- and tenth-grade world history (ancient and modern) at a diverse and progressive independent school in St. Louis, Missouri.

**Courses recently taught:**

Co-Instructor, *Advanced Skills, Concepts, and Theory for MA Historians,* compulsory MA module, History Department, UCL

Instructor, *Race, Ethnicity, and the ‘Other’*, advanced undergraduate module, History Dept. UCL

Instructor, *Africa, Decolonization, and Internationalism*, advanced undergraduate module, History Department, UCL

Co-Instructor, *Writing History*, compulsory undergraduate module, History Dept, UCL

RECENT CommUnity Involvement AND OTHER SERVICE

**Amnesty International Steering Committee Member for the Community addressing tech-facilitated violations of displaced persons and migrants’ rights** — January 2022-present

**Expert witness on asylum case, on instruction for the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI)** — July-September 2021

**Advisory Board Member, Haki na Sheria Initiative**, Garissa, Kenya — August 2020-present

**Workshop Facilitator, Makan**, London — August 2018-present

**Volunteer, Akwaaba**, London — March 2020-January 2021