

## Deferred and Uncertain: Notions of Emotional Displacement among African Kenyan Migrants in London

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Current approaches to transnationalism and migration are grounded and historicized such that transnational practices are no longer seen as occurring in a ‘third space’ nor are migrants viewed as being ‘neither here nor there’ (Bhabha 1990). Instead, much research focuses on notions of ‘place’ in two senses: first, as geographic location(s), an inevitability since migration entails (actual or imagined) movement between countries of origin and destination, and, second, in notions of ‘home’, which have largely been conceptualized as being ‘locatable’ in terms of physical dwellings and actual landscapes. Ideas of displacement and emplacement tend to be discussed within these contexts.

However, these senses of place do not resonate in the lives and subjectivities of African Kenyan migrants in London and Nairobi among whom I work. In this paper, I explore two interrelated senses of ‘place’ that are salient: ‘place’ as a situation or circumstance (‘I wouldn’t want to be in your *place*’) and as role or duty (‘it is not your *place* to criticize’). I argue that some African Kenyan migrants feel emotionally displaced in these terms by virtue of their migration experiences, while nonetheless being corporally emplaced in London and physically displaced from Kenya.

Drawing on 14 months of fieldwork in Britain and Kenya, I first discuss how the two more common understandings of ‘place’ are not salient among African Kenyan migrants, whose migration to London often has historical and familial antecedents and who chose London because of the (imagined) possibilities it represents, not because it is ‘London’. The places where they reside are typically chosen for pragmatic reasons of cost, while those where they socialize and worship tend to be anonymous venues like meeting halls on council estates and empty warehouses. I contend then that many migrants are neither trying to transform these spaces into meaningful ‘places’, nor does much of their sense of displacement primarily arise from their living outside Kenya.

Instead, notions of emplacement and displacement among African Kenyan migrants are better understood by looking at their emotional, inter-subjective experiences. In particular, I examine the stories of several informants whose migration has generated a sense of emotional displacement because of the (indefinite) deferral of lifecycle moments like marriage and childbearing; the uncertainty of their legal status; and the strain of dispersed familial ties. This re-conceptualization of ‘place’ in more experiential, lived terms complements the spatial and geographic uses common in migration research.