



# Working Papers

Paper 41, May 2011

## **African migrants negotiate 'home' and 'belonging'**

Re-framing transnationalism through  
a diasporic landscape

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This paper is published by the International Migration Institute (IMI), Oxford Department of International Development (QEH), University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Road, Oxford OX1 3TB, UK ([www.imi.ox.ac.uk](http://www.imi.ox.ac.uk)).

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- analyse migration as part of broader global change
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### Abstract

In recent years the volume and dynamics of migration from Africa to Europe have come under increasing study. The resulting breadth of research is impressive and includes such topics as gender and migration, migration and development, refugees and transnationalism. However, this work still suffers from the limitations imposed by existing migration theories that privilege the host context over the sending context focusing on linear processes and bounded conceptual frameworks. Through field work with Ugandan migrants and their descendants in Britain, this paper challenges existing theoretical limitations by proposing an inter-disciplinary approach that draws on transnationalism, diaspora and cultural geographical perspectives on landscape. Through this lens the concept of diasporic landscape emerges as an innovative contribution to migration theory as it highlights the embeddedness of migrants' lives, within processes of production and reproduction of a discursive terrain that straddles Uganda and Britain. It captures the multi-faceted physical and symbolic impacts of migrants' lived realities and privileges the continued impact of the sending context, cultural and temporal dimensions. The contours that emerge through migrants' everyday practices of 'belonging' highlight asymmetric power relations. These shift in complex patterns disrupting such bounded notions as migration, immobility, the migrant, non-migrant, refugee, citizen or undocumented person.

**Keywords:** Ugandan migrants, transnationalism, diaspora, diasporic landscape, African migrants

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**Acknowledgements:** This paper was first presented at the 3<sup>rd</sup> African Migrations Workshop, organised by the International Migration Institute (IMI), University of Oxford, and L'Institut fondamental d'Afrique noire, Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal on 16–19 November 2010. I would like to thank Mirjam de Bruijn and Oliver Bakewell for their feedback and comments on this paper. I would also like to thank the workshop organisers for all their support in providing a stimulating environment for discussion and debate about the contribution of African scholarship to migration theory.

## Contents

1 Introduction .....	4
2 Transnational social spaces: ‘origins’, ‘interstitials’, ‘circulations’ .....	6
2.1 Origins.....	7
2.2 Interstitials.....	8
2.3 Circulations.....	9
2.4 Networks and ties.....	10
3 Diaspora Re-visited .....	12
4 Towards ‘new’ cultural geography .....	13
5 The textual materiality of the diasporic landscape .....	14
6 Discussion: ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ .....	16
7 Conclusion.....	20
References .....	21

# 1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a growth in the study of the volume and dynamics of migration from Africa to Europe. This has taken many forms from a range of disciplinary perspectives including migration and development, refugee studies, gender and migration, return migration, and African transnationalism (Ammassari and Black 2001; Black and King 2004; Kabki et al. 2004; Zack Williams and Mohan 2002; Tiemoko 2004). Much of this work draws on transnationalism as a theoretical framework to explore migrants' relationships and interaction between the host and sending context. What I argue in this paper is that in examining transnational ties and enactments in a migrant population composed of more mixed flows, distinct layers of opacity come to the fore. The first is the under-theorisation of the sending context within migration theories that privilege the host context. The second is the elision of questions of culture and history as the presence of migrants is framed in simplistic discourses of documentation, status and integration.

I draw on research with Ugandan migrants and their descendants in Britain to propose a refinement of the transnationalism framework. My research, conceptualised as a multi-sited ethnography, seeks to understand how this 'community' negotiates questions of 'home' and 'belonging' within their everyday lives in Britain. My critique of the transnationalism framework in many ways evolved through the methodological approach I took towards this research. My methodology was both transactional and subjective and emphasised the interaction between the researcher and researched, drawing on constructivism, which emphasises that data and the 'findings' of a study are created *within the process* of the research (Guba and Lincoln 1998: 206). Mobility in its various aspects is central to the multi-sited ethnographic approach as it calls on the researcher to contemplate not only different locations by following the people, but a range of other investigatory strategies. So in addition to following the people I took up other strategies which were to 'follow the metaphor' and to 'follow the plot, story or allegory' (Marcus 1995).

My main methods of data collection were personal life narratives, participant observation and in-depth interviews with key leaders in the 'community' including religious and association leaders. Virtual ethnography incorporated online communities, blogs, online news, socio-political commentary and a range of cultural forums. In addition participant observation was conducted in a wide variety of settings including formal gatherings, meetings, fundraising events as well as informal gatherings within people's homes. Field work was carried out over 18 months, with the majority of time spent in Britain and a smaller yet significant period of four months spent in Uganda. I aimed to conduct the research in a way that remained open to the vagaries of the field as well as to the challenges and opportunities that participants and different methods of data collection and analysis presented. My aim was that this self-conscious and self-reflexive mode would hopefully remain vigilant to pre-conceived assumptions and lead to more insightful analysis of the data collected. I specifically viewed the theoretical analysis of the research data and the process of data collection as mutually constitutive parts of the same whole, that carried on at different levels throughout the entire research process.

In Britain the Ugandan 'community' is highly heterogeneous and reflects a diversity of social economic backgrounds and ethnicity. It includes naturalised citizens, refugees, those holding indefinite leave to remain or exceptional leave to remain status, students, economic migrants, asylum seekers, the second and subsequent generations, the undocumented (overstayers) and *kyeyo*. *Kyeyo* is a term used within Uganda and the wider Ugandan 'community' to denote those migrants who do low-status jobs to earn valuable foreign exchange as their primary motive for migration. Pre-independence migration was mostly made up of 'student elites'. These were the first Africans who came to Britain to undertake university studies, and were usually sponsored by the colonial government or the religious establishment. Following independence and after a short period of stability Uganda lurched into violent political instability that led to the refugee flows of the 1970s and 1980s (Lomo et al. 2001). Changes to this stratified pattern began from the mid 1980s onwards when relative peace, ongoing war in the north of the country, and increased economic hardship as a result of structural adjustment policies compounded migration flows (Nabuguzi 1998; Mutibwa 1992).

Ugandan migrants do not numerically represent the most populous of migration flows from Africa to Europe. However, what makes them interesting is the diversity of trajectories and sustained nature of their migration flows. Against this backdrop my research seeks to understand how migrants from Uganda and their descendants negotiate questions of 'home' and 'belonging' within their everyday lives in Britain. It is conceptualised as an ethnography that draws on personal life narratives yet precludes directly asking participants where they think 'home' is and where they think they 'belong'. This reflects my central research hypothesis that migrants' lives continue to be marked by notions of mobility and 'otherness' that potentially negate differentials of migration trajectory, status or longevity of stay. I argue that research with this group of African migrants strengthens the call for a refinement of the transnationalism framework and an incorporation of historical and cultural processes.

I take a cue from Steven Vertovec and heed his call to consider disciplinary borrowing if it strengthens our theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Vertovec 2003). To this end I turn to cultural geography and its rich vein of theoretical enquiry into the nature of landscape (Cosgrove and Daniels 1988; Duncan 1990; Mitchell 2000) and relate it to migrants' engagement in transnational social spaces. The term I use to encapsulate this hybridised conceptual approach is diasporic landscape. This draws on 'diaspora' – a term that still has purchase within migration studies. Diasporic landscape and diasporic identities are terms increasingly used by scholars when describing migrant groups that stretch the more traditional typologies of diaspora (Basu 2007; Christou and King 2010; Mohan 2002). The popularity of these terms lies in the root of the word diaspora which maintains a dynamic relationship couched in notions of nation, exile, 'home', 'belonging', migration, return. Even in the at times divergent typologies of diaspora outlined by Cohen (1997), Safran (1991) and Tölölyan (1996) there remains this shared kernel of a relational and dynamic archetype.

## 2 Transnational social spaces: ‘origins’, ‘interstitials’, ‘circulations’

Transnational social spaces or transnational social fields,<sup>1</sup> as some theorists refer to them, are the ‘spaces’ of interaction generated through migrants’ (and non-migrants’) engagements in transnationalism (Faist 2000; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Smith 2005). It is a term that is used at both a theoretical level as in the work of Thomas Faist (2000), and as a description of the material and symbolic spaces that arise through transnationalism. In my own work these two points are crucial in unpacking migrants’ and their descendants’ understandings and articulations of ‘home and ‘belonging’. Faist’s typology of transnational social spaces (2000) usefully delineates them as transnational kinship groups, transnational circuits and transnational communities. Fundamental to this typology is an insistence on the dynamic nature of these three types of transnational social space. They illustrate evolving, non-static ‘combinations of ties, positions in networks and organizations, and networks of organizations that reach across the borders of multiple states’ (Faist 2000: 191). They manifest at a range of levels – macro, meso and micro – and incorporate a temporal dimension that both considers the *past* and *present* in the range of examples it draws on.

Since the 1990s transnationalism, with its concern with migrants’ ties, networks and social spaces in more than one nation state, has emerged as one of the major conceptual frames for theorising and understanding migrants’ lives (Basch et al. 1994; Faist 2000; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 1999). These range from the socio-economic to the cultural, political and religious dimensions at varying degrees of scale (Basch et al. 1994; Faist 2000; Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Guarnizo 2003; Levitt 2001; Smith and Guarnizo 1998). Whereas some studies stress the simultaneity of migrants’ embedded engagement within multiple sites as a key attribute of transnationalism, other studies concede the disjointed variability that exists in its manifestation even within one family unit (Fog Olwig 2003; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). Furthermore these ties, engagements and enactments can appear in both material and symbolic forms. Transnationalism concerns itself with alternative ways to theorise migrants’ lives not as singular linear trajectories from sending country to host nation. It encapsulates the fluidity of boundary-crossing activities on a range of spatial and temporal dimensions. It thus privileges such notions as hybridity, long-distance nationalism and de-territorialisation, to capture migrants’ lived realities as embedded in more than one nation state (Basch et al. 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Hannerz 1996; Portes et al. 1999).

Transnationalism has attracted criticism particularly regarding whether it presents anything new (Kivisto 2001), or whether it is simply a renaming of earlier migration processes. Scholars such as Vertovec (1999; 2004c) and Portes (2003) in very different ways have sought to analyse and delimit transnationalism. Vertovec (2004c) directly confronts the key criticism that transnationalism as a framework lacks conceptual rigour due to its overuse and conflation with other terms such as multinational, global and diasporic. This conflation is further demonstrated through the lack of differentiation when ‘trans’ is used as a prefix to refer to scale, i.e. ‘trans-national’, ‘trans-state’, ‘trans-local’ processes and phenomena (Vertovec 2004c). As Portes (2003) concurs, there is a need to develop a language that distinguishes between the range of migrants engaged in various activities and the ties that

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<sup>1</sup> In my use of the term I refer to transnational social spaces, although at times I use the term transnational social field when directly referencing those scholars who use this, i.e. Carling (2008), Levitt (2001), and Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004).

span host and sending communities. I want to delineate below the three features of transnational social spaces that I draw upon for my theoretical framework. I refer to these as 'origins', 'interstitials' and 'circulations'.

## **2.1 Origins**

'Origins' highlights what some theorists urge us to acknowledge – the socio-historical dimensions and structures of migrants' transnationalism – although the term transnationalism may not have been used in past studies (Al-Ali et al. 2001a, 2001b; Grillo and Mazzucato 2008; Guarnizo 2003; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). This focus reveals the continuing ramifications of transnational practices that while numerically might actively involve a small proportion of the population, nevertheless contribute to macro-social economic processes whose impact aggregates over time in both sending and receiving contexts (Portes 2003: 877–8). Vertovec also draws our attention to the relationship between aggregate change, migrants' transnationalism and transformation (2004b). He notes fundamental modes of transformation as occurring in three domains:

*1) perceptual transformation affecting what can be described as migrants' orientational 'bifocality' in the sociocultural domain; 2) conceptual transformation of meanings within a notional triad of 'identities-borders-orders' in the political domain; and 3) institutional transformation affecting forms of financial transfer, public–private relationships and local development in the economic domain (Vertovec 2004b: 971).*

Faist (2000) locates transnational social spaces as embedded within international migration systems. In the case of Uganda, and the migrants and refugees she has spawned, it is useful to situate their exodus or flight as embedded within the international migration system that specifically joins Uganda to Britain – but more broadly incorporates Africa and Europe. There is a long history of migration from Africa to Europe that spans colonial times to the present day. It encompasses that earlier variant of forced migration – the slave trade – but also includes diplomats, missionaries, servants, soldiers, merchants and seamen coming to Africa from Europe (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008: 175–6). This illustrates a long-standing bi-directional migration system between these two continents.

The often neglected historical layer of analysis of migration between Africa and Europe is important because it enables us to think through and link more broadly today's heightened streams of migrants and refugees to earlier migration streams during Empire and the two world wars: an era marked by 'immense economic, political and social upheaval due to failing economies, unemployment (especially of young educated people), social strife, war, corruption, environmental and/or health problems (e.g. HIV/AIDS)' (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008: 181–2). It is important to acknowledge that 'an appreciation of the historical emergence of migratory patterns is crucial in understanding the form that transnational activities will take' (Al-Ali et al. 2001a, 2001b). These historic and ongoing 'transnational links' are seen in both the material and symbolic legacies they have bequeathed in individual identifications, as well as institutionally through school and religion, and the nation's self-imagination visible in Uganda's socio-economic and political structures as a member of the Commonwealth intrinsically linked to Britain.

A recent thought-provoking special issue of the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* edited by Grillo and Mazzucato utilises 'Africa<>Europe' to symbolise 'double

engagement' as its lens on transnationalism within different African migrant communities in Europe (2008). Their 'Africa<>Europe' perspective also asserts the role of history within transnational social spaces. In their editorial, Grillo and Mazzucato situate transnationalism not only as a response to the 'oldness-newness' critique stated earlier, but draw our awareness to the historical embeddedness of some of these processes (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008: 178–9). Although they acknowledge the dearth of information on the specific transnational relations between Africa<>Europe during colonial times and postcolonial times, there is also much we know from a historical perspective about the importance of this relationship.

Student migration from Africa to Europe is a case in point, as these early cadres of Africans were the future pro-independence activists, as well as missionaries, doctors, lawyers, teachers and other trained professionals. There is much work that remains to be done both through archives and with surviving members of that generation of Africans *and* Europeans, who were the early 'expatriate' migrants of Africa. The institutional and individual relationships that resulted from those first colonial encounters are the seeds of today's transnational connections – the Africa<>Europe double engagement (Grillo and Mazzucato 2008). These seeds planted in colonial times continue to blossom today in the burgeoning numbers of Africans in Europe. In Uganda institutionally the fruits of continuing transnational engagement are seen in the instruments of government, the legal and judiciary framework, in education, civil society and lastly, but quite powerfully, through religion.

These three early nodes of transnational engagement – the professionalisation of 'work and employment', the entrance into the global capitalist system that colonialism heralded, and the role of education and organised religion – are key nodes of migrants' identification and recurrent themes within their personal narratives. The current Archbishop of York John Sentamu embodies this engagement powerfully. Born in Uganda, he trained as a lawyer but had to flee and was granted political refugee status in Britain. He now holds the second most powerful position in the Church of England. He continues to use his position to speak out against injustices in both the African continent of his origin and in Britain – both his core constituencies.

## **2.2 Interstitials**

The term 'interstitials' alludes to the interstitial points between migrants' and non-migrants' material and symbolic engagement with transnationalism. These points call attention to the 'edges' of transnational social spaces where scales of inclusion and exclusion co-exist with fluid 'centres' and 'margins' expressed within this topography (Yeoh et al. 2003). Carling draws our attention to the human dynamics at this boundary or edge between migrants and non-migrants where 'the solidarity of transnationalism is mixed with frustrations and conflict' (Carling 2008: 1452). It is at and within these interstitial points that asymmetries in transnational relationships (Carling 2008: 1453), and I would add power relations, are at their most visible. These fundamental asymmetries are visible at the 'edge' or border of the transnational social field that migrants and non-migrants buttress. This links to my insistence on heeding theorists' call that transnationalism encompasses both migrants and non-migrants (Carling 2008; Faist 2000; Guarnizo 2003). Nicholas Van Hear calls for migration studies not only to investigate the 'livelihood strategies and development prospects of those left behind ... but their relations with people who leave' (2000: 1). Faist



insists that ‘transnational webs include relatively immobile persons and collectives’ (2000: 191), and as Steven Vertovec elaborates: ‘The point about nonmigrants is significant: such a transnational social reality incorporates and infuses what we can call the bifocality of many people “left behind” but whose lives are still transformed by the transnational activities and ideologies among those who actually move’ (Vertovec 2004b: 976).

To analyse asymmetries of relationship between migrants and non-migrants within transnational social fields at and within these interstitials, Carling usefully delineates three points of departure. First, that ‘there are intrinsic asymmetries in the transnational relations between migrants and their non-migrant counterparts in the area of origin’ (Carling 2008: 1453). These asymmetries are also reflected for migrants in the area of destination, particularly as regards migrants’ imperfect knowledge of events in Uganda. Other instances in the data demonstrate significant disjunctures, as when Ugandan migrants in Britain operate from a fossilised cultural register – morally, materially and symbolically. Whereas people in Uganda may have moved on in certain socio-cultural practices, those in Britain may adhere to socio-cultural practices that do not reflect the Uganda of today. Second, Carling notes that ‘asymmetries can be a source of frustration for both sides’. Thirdly he notes that:

*Asymmetry does not always imply that migrants are always in a powerful position vis à vis [non]-migrants or the other way round. On the contrary, transnational practices are shaped by the multi-faceted nature of the relationship, with migrants and non-migrants experiencing vulnerability and ascendancy at different times and in different contexts (Carling 2008: 1453).*

### **2.3 Circulations**

‘Circulations’ refers to the circular, situated and at times continuous sway between migrants’ sustained, occasional or nil manifestation of transnational engagement (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). It brings together both ‘interstitials’ and ‘origins’ to capture the implicit and explicit dynamism and fluidity that flow through transnational practices across different temporal registers and social spaces. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) draw our attention to the fluidity of these transnational social spaces with ‘simultaneity’ as the crucial variable (see also Smith 2005). They use the term ‘social fields’ to describe ‘sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized and transformed’ (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007: 132). Within these transnational social spaces or transnational social fields, actors engage in activities and processes that extend across borders transcending the political, economic, social and cultural boundaries of the nation state.

The perspective of ‘circulations’ brings together both ‘edges’ and ‘origins’ to capture the dynamism and fluidity that flows between transnational practices across different temporal registers and social spaces. On the temporal dimension, ‘circulations’ incorporate the socio-historical past and the present day. ‘Circulations’ also relate to how changes in communication practices offer ‘new’ modes of incorporation and interaction with and through transnational practices. The increased diffusion of ICT, in particular the Internet and mobile telephony, plays a constituent part in the ‘circulations’ that occur within transnational social spaces.

## 2.4 Networks and ties

A consideration of networks and social ties is integral to theorising transnational social spaces. Transnationalism, with its focus on networks, ties and connections (Basch et al. 1994; Hannerz 1996), links into earlier migration research addressing networks (Gurak and Caces 1992; Kritz and Zlotnik 1992). These earlier theorists attempted to define what constituted networks and what function they served. Gurak and Caces argued 'that networks need to be looked at as dynamic relationships and variable social arrangements that vary across ethnic group *and time* [my emphasis] and shape migration and its sequels' (quoted in Kritz and Zlotnik 1992: 6). Adopting a migration networks system analytical approach, Gurak and Caces posited that 'networks at origin ... can either restrain or encourage an individual to migrate depending on the extent to which they provide economic and social support ... networks at destination can facilitate or discourage adaptation and integration depending on the extent to which they give migrants access to diverse resources' (quoted in Kritz and Zlotnik 1992: 6).

Transnationalism both relies on and facilitates networks. These networks are manifest through a range of ties, for example institutional and associational as well as family and kinship. They serve as 'networks of adaptive assistance to recent migrants ... insulating migrants from the destination society' (Gurak and Caces 1992: 154). Some of these ties are individual, 'autonomous' and not necessarily linked to the family, or to family kinship strategies, while others stem from institutions or associational membership. Boyd in her oft-quoted work on family, networks and migration usefully describes networks as vibrant over space and time, and as links that exist between family, friends, community and society (1989). They carry 'information, resources, assistance and obligations between the sending and receiving country' (Boyd 1989: 641), both physically through migrants' movement (circular, onward), as well as through remittances, modes of communications and other cultural artefacts. Networks are increasingly mediated through new technologies revealing the disruption as well as pluralisation of the public sphere (Vertovec 2004a, 2004b: 977).

Faist identifies three types of 'resources within social and symbolic ties that allow individuals to cooperate in networks, groups and organizations [and] also serve to connect individuals to networks and organizations through affiliations' (2000: 192). These three types of primary resource – reciprocity, exchange and solidarity – correspond to the three types of transnational social space he identifies in his typology and which are also present in some of the literature on social capital (see Coleman 1988). *Reciprocity* as a social norm involves 'social exchange in the form of mutual obligations and expectations of the actors, associated with specific social ties and based on exchanges and services rendered in the past'. *Exchange* involves 'mutual obligations and expectations of the actors, and is an outcome of instrumental activity' (e.g. the tit-for-tat principle). *Solidarity* involves 'shared ideas, beliefs, evaluations and symbols; expressed in some sort of collective identity' (Faist 2000: 192, 195). As Carling notes 'boundaries between groups are of course, blurred. However, they invite analyses of the dynamics [at the] interfaces' (2008: 1456).

This insistence on boundaries around 'networks' and 'ties' as necessarily 'blurred' corresponds to the reality of many migrants' and non-migrants' lives within transnational social spaces. For example, their own socio-economic and/or class positionality may promote or hinder access to the primary resource embedded within particular ties. This can be observed in the case of Ugandan migrants in Britain. Their migration trajectory, whether

they came as economic migrants, asylum seekers and/or refugees, is ultimately superseded by the 'official' immigration status they occupy. Whether they are granted asylum, or indefinite leave to stay, or neither, places them in the realm of the documented or undocumented migrant. This has a very real impact on their socio-economic possibilities and class positionality. However, this does not necessarily lead to a permanent 'loss' or 'gain' in status, as access to networks and embedded resources is also a fluid reflection of the 'spaces' within which migrants' lives are located. These span both transnational social spaces and the general society space around, which may or may not be engaged in transnationalism.

A key function of social networks and social ties is as carriers of the resources or range of 'capitals' – social, economic, political – that imbue all spheres of migrants' lives. Monetary remittances, as Guarnizo draws to our attention, have been the most 'cited, tangible evidence and measuring stick for the ties connecting migrants with their societies of origin' (2003: 666). However, this singular approach privileges north-to-south flows and ignores 'the multiple macroeconomic effects that migrants' transnational economic and *non economic* [my emphasis] connections generate and, thus, underestimates migrants' agency and their influence at the global level' (Guarnizo 2003: 666–7). To capture the more intangible south-to-north flows it is helpful to use the concept of social remittances. Social remittances are the ideas, practices, identities and social capital that flow between migrants and non-migrants in the sending context (Levitt 1998). They flow in both north-to-south and south-to-north directions. This brings to the fore the strength and relevance of the 'left-behind' and the need to conceptualise them within the same theoretical framework as migrants. Peggy Levitt identifies three types of social remittances: normative structures, systems of practice and social capital. Normative structures are the values, norms of behaviour and beliefs that also 'encompass ideas about gender, race, and class identity'. They form the basis of social capital and are socially remitted (Levitt 1998: 933–5).

Guarnizo's concept of transnational living can usefully bridge the role of monetary and social remittances within networks and symbolic ties. He proposes it as a more holistic prism that emphasises migrants' agency and the multi-faceted continuing impact of the left-behind and historical and structural processes as migrants draw on a broad range of 'social, cultural, political, and economic cross-border relations ... both wittingly and unwittingly, [in their] drive to maintain and reproduce their social milieu of origin from afar' (Guarnizo 2003: 667–670). There is a symbiotic relationship between social remittances, monetary remittances and social capital. They are dependent on social, historic, material and symbolic ties to carry their resources. Social capital can be difficult to transfer; however, local assets such as language, kin and social attachments, religious and congregational affiliation or distinct cultural-ideological outlooks are easier to transfer when 'transnational networks ... emerge in the course of international migration, [and] the transferability of ties carrying obligations, reciprocity, solidarity, information and control increases' (Faist 2000: 194).

### 3 Diaspora Re-visited

Migration scholars privilege social relations within communities and the majority of host communities, whereas human geography privileges debates around space and place more broadly. 'Diaspora' is a term with ancient origins that traditionally denoted long-standing migrant communities, such as the Jews and the Armenians, with a specific history of persecution, flight and separation from an original 'homeland'. In the global socio-economic upheavals that have characterised the mid to late twentieth century as colonialism collapsed and the 'age of migration' (Castles and Miller 1993) came truly upon us, the term 'diaspora' has increasingly been applied by scholars, politicians, activists, and indeed members of the individual communities concerned to ever-widening groups of people.

Diaspora as a concept, definition and identity has come to span various typologies, with its use and usefulness highly contested (Cohen 1997; Tölölyan 1996). The prefix 'new' diasporas has been added as 'new' waves of migrant groups in more numbers are scattered around the globe (Van Hear 1998), including the specific context of recent postcolonial African movements (Koser 2003). The migrant groups that this term is applied to or appropriated by typically stem from either 'forced' migration, i.e. wars, political instability or environment degradation, or from 'voluntary' migration, i.e. economic migrants seeking a better life. Diaspora as an analytical concept is employed by scholars from a variety of disciplines including geography, anthropology, history, cultural studies and sociology to investigate different aspects of migrants' communities, and one could argue that this demonstrates the strength and resilience of the concept.

Diaspora is increasingly linked with transnationalism inscribing another level of analysis, now that the concept of permanent return to the 'homeland' encapsulated in its original definition seems insufficient. As Tölölyan describes them, contemporary diasporas are the 'exemplary communities of the transnational moment' (1996: 4). Pnina Werbner posits transnationals or transmigrants as though linked to the global but actually living 'anchored in translocal social networks and cultural diasporas' (1997). Their solidarity as translocals is a corresponding result of their poor social and economic conditions, 'racist rejections' which engender self-help, community building and mutual support for their culture, beliefs, religions and funerals (Werbner 1997: 12). However, this solidarity cannot be taken as a given. As individual Ugandan migrants' lived realities illustrate, many may not be 'anchored in translocal social networks and cultural diasporas' (Werbner 1997). This could be linked to political considerations and their trajectory as refugees, or could be a lifestyle 'choice' that reflects socio-economic considerations such as employment, housing, education or further internal migration within Britain.

The Ugandan diaspora is linked to Uganda and Britain through a multiplicity of ties and networks that manifest on a range of scales within and outside the diaspora. Migrant and non-migrant networks that might not be part of transnational social spaces, for example a local black British women's group, can have unintended feedback consequences through migrants' ties and networks – that then directly impact relationships. Faist's (2000) identified resources of reciprocity, exchange and solidarity are not just present and utilised through networks and ties (both individual and institutional) within transnational social spaces. These resources are also present and utilised by those not engaged within transnational social spaces *and* those who do not self-identify as being part of a diaspora which nevertheless can impact migrants' lives and feedback materially and symbolically.

We need to insist on the coeval nature of migrants' lives with those of the non-migrants (in the host community and in the country of origin) so we can apply this 'dual aspect' dynamism, fluidity, weak and strong ties to all aspects of migrants' lived realities. This comes across in the field-work data I gathered, as migrants in many different ways attempt to bridge the various networks and ties that weave their lives in a quest to appropriate meaningful coherent notions of 'home' and 'belonging'. It is important in trying to analyse Ugandan migrants' utilisation of ties and networks that we acknowledge that these 'dual aspect' networks and ties mutually co-exist. The networks and ties that Boyd (1989), Faist (2000) and Vertovec (1999) delineate and insert into their useful typologies are not free-floating variables that apply solely to migrants' lives. Their relevance lies in acknowledging their flows within, against and through the non-migrant mainstream society around them – *and* in the sending context.

This inherent contestation and widening remit of the concept of diaspora could be seen as a weakening of its conceptual usefulness. However, as a constantly evolving term, one way to reinvigorate its analytical purchase is to acknowledge that in order to 'inaugurate new directions for research ... [diaspora will come to be] reworked from different disciplinary vantage points and re-interpolated into widely divergent ethnographic accounts' (Werbner 2000: 5). To this end I suggest how concepts from cultural geography's engagement with landscape can offer another layer of analysis in the study of diaspora communities. My aim is not to reinforce or set up discreet boundaries between cultural geography and migration studies. However, as much of the key work being done in this field is inter-disciplinary, I hope that this approach will further enrich debates and bring out points of contact between the various disciplinary vantage points involved in the study of migrants and migrant communities. I propose that in utilising conceptual tools from 'new' cultural geography's engagement with landscape we can better apprehend migrants' texts and representations particularly as they pertain to such multi-level and fluid notions as 'home' and 'belonging'.

#### **4 Towards 'new' cultural geography**

Cultural geography, a fairly youthful branch of geography, grew out of geography's increasing disenchantment with the philosophical and methodological standpoint of environmental determinism. One of its key critiques came from the work of Carl Sauer in the USA, and what came to be known as the Berkeley school of cultural geography (Mitchell 2000). In his seminal text *The Morphology of Landscape*, Sauer argued for geography to re-focus on its key task as the establishment of 'a critical system which embraces the phenomenology of landscape in order to grasp in all of its meaning and colour the varied terrestrial scene' (1963: 320, quoted in Mitchell 2000: 26). Furthermore, Sauer placed the agency of man (sic) as central to the fashioning of landscape, his two most quoted statements being: 'The cultural landscape is fashioned from a natural landscape by a culture group', and 'Culture is the agent, the natural area is the medium, the cultural landscape the result' (1963: 343, quoted in Mitchell 2000: 27). Sauer thus placed landscape and human agency at the centre of what became known as cultural geography.

This was soon to be superseded in the 1970s and 1980s by 'new' cultural geography. Cultural geographers, particularly from Britain, became increasingly influenced by work from cultural studies. Whereas humanists foregrounded perspective and image as a way of

seeing landscape, the work of other cultural geographers, Cosgrove (1984), Daniels (1990), and Duncan (1990), to name three key scholars, was to herald a more decisive shift in the focus of cultural geography's engagement with landscape and signal the advent of 'new' cultural geography. Cosgrove in his seminal text *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (1984) and subsequent work emphasised that this 'way of seeing' had to be placed in its historical and social context. Daniels' work on the other hand, made a more explicit link between ways of seeing and the 'material conditions which overdetermine them' (Cresswell 2003: 272). The work of James Duncan emphasised 'reading' the landscape as a 'text', 'through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored' (1990: 17). Together these works heralded a shift in the focus of landscape geography 'toward representation and circulation of meanings rather than the material transformation of landscapes' (Mercer 2002: 40).

Cosgrove and Domosh state that in many ways 'new cultural geography is part of the response to the crisis of geographical representation' (1993:30). The recognition of gender inscription in traditional spatial metaphors and the move towards metaphors drawn from culture and the arts signified a renouncing of the meta-metaphor and meta-narrative, a move reflected in other social science disciplines such as anthropology (Cosgrove and Domosh 1993:30-31). However, it is important to note that as textual approaches were embraced and adopted by cultural geographers, they also sustained a persistent critique because of their perceived disengagement with material processes (Mercer 2002; Mitchell 1996, 2003; Philo 2000). It is to this work, and to the debates and critiques that foreground text, representation and the social material context in cultural geography, that I now turn.

## **5 The textual materiality of the diasporic landscape**

There is a theoretical fuzziness around how different theorists working in the transnationalism framework denote 'space'. For example, Guarnizo's concept of transnational living situates migrants' 'economic' activities within their context of social, political and cultural practices. Furthermore, it cuts across and incorporates 'multiple geographical scales' and acknowledges the coeval nature of migrants' 'lifeworlds'. However, what is not clear is how researchers can capture these processes analytically. There is a need for more critical engagement with questions of culture. Don Mitchell, in discussing why culture is important to geography, notes that '[c]ulture wars are about defining what is legitimate in a society, who is an "insider" and who is an "outsider"... determining the social boundaries that govern our lives' (Mitchell 2000: 6).

Too often migrant communities are portrayed as homogeneous and separate from the mainstream society, replicating Gilroy's concern of 'cultures supposedly sealed from one another forever by ethnic lines' (1987: 55). There is an emphasis on ethnicity as their key marker or they are delineated against other criteria such as migration trajectory and engagement with transnationalism. In Britain there are people of Ugandan descent who do not necessarily self-identify as part of the Ugandan 'community' or as a migrant 'community'. In fact, the very notion of 'community' is a point of contention and active debate within migrants' narratives. Concepts from cultural geography's engagement with landscape can feed into and strengthen transnational engagement with migrants' insertion and inscription of space and place. Mitchell highlights the need to focus on re-materialising the texts that make up this landscape because '[l]andscape is thus best understood as a kind

of produced, lived, and represented space constructed out of the struggles, compromises, and temporarily settled relations of competing social actors: it is both a thing (or a suite of things), as Sauer would have it, and a social process, at once solidly material and ever changing' (1996: 30).

There is an opaqueness and 'silence' around issues of 'culture' within the transnationalism framework as suggested by the under-theorisation of this dynamic. As Karen Fog Olwig notes, transnationalism 'has drawn attention to the significance of attachments to people and places that transcend the confines of particular nations. ...[but then] simplifies the complexity of migration processes and the socioeconomic relations and cultural values that underline these processes' (2003: 787–8). This disengagement needs to be redressed because, as Mitchell points out: '... arguments over "culture" are arguments over real spaces, over landscapes, over the social relations that define the places in which we and others live' (2000: 6). It is hard to see how we can theorise the position of migrant communities, especially those that have been settled for a long time, without considering culture. By conceptualising transnational social spaces through cultural geography's engagement with landscape, you privilege the dynamic of these 'spaces' as they interact *together with and as part of* the host community's societal structures and environment. One can then more legitimately explore migrants' lives, answering key criticisms of transnationalism, notably its tendency to place migrants in a bubble – a space specific to them – echoed in some of the seemingly deterministic typologies as to what constitutes 'legitimate' transnationalism (Portes et al. 1999: 221).

James Duncan's seminal work *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* heralded the inter-textual 'landscape as text' approach with its roots in contemporary literary theory (1990). As Duncan notes, the landscape 'acts as a signifying system through which a social system is communicated, reproduced, experienced, and explored' (1990: 17). The main critiques of this approach stem from the emphasis on reading 'text', favouring the gaze and silencing material processes. Its strength lies in its emphasis and recognition of the discursive nature and power relations embedded in landscape, and the acknowledgement that 'read' meanings are rendered unstable as one cannot foresee any individual's reading of the landscape (Duncan 1990; Mercer 2002).

Mitchell's work on problematising the Californian landscape, both its visible and invisible spheres, emphasises 'landscapes of toil', landscapes that are built and are part of material economic structures (1996, 2003). As 'landscapes of toil' (Mitchell 1996) there is a certain amount of labour involved, both visible and invisible, in the production of 'texts' that make up this landscape of diaspora. Mitchell's insistence on bringing materiality back into landscape as part of material economic structures is interesting for the study of diaspora. The migration and scattering of people, whether forced or not, who compose diasporas are very often tied up with local and global economic forces. Mitchell problematises these 'landscapes of toil' to include the migrants, the scientists and pesticide manufacturers involved in advancing the strawberry production that colours part of the Californian landscape to draw a complex picture of socio-economic relations (1996, 2000). It is important to be aware of complexity and in my field work I occupied multiple positionings not only to gain a range of vantage points for this multi-sited ethnography, but also to focus

on migrants' self-articulated social and economic remittance practices, identity and gender dynamics within the diasporic landscape.<sup>2</sup>

It is these approaches that I draw on to re-vitalise and strengthen the conceptualisation of 'space' within migrants' lived realities. If landscapes are palimpsests of past and current labour practices, mobilities and materialities, how can such texts appeal to the migration scholar? These texts can range from actual transnational practices to those practices that lie outside the scope of transnationalism, but nevertheless impact on a migrant community, host countries and home country. Inter-textual analysis privileges a reading of diaspora as landscape and involves the analysis of a range of texts ranging from the performative, written, built, in fact 'anything with a degree of permanence that communicates meaning' (Shurmer-Smith 2002: 123). Inter-textual analysis reflects this by its emphasis on polysemy, intersubjectivity, discourse and the contested nature of representation (Shurmer-Smith 2002). An integrated cultural geography perspective on diaspora as landscape could more actively bring to the fore the material and symbolic engagements of migrants and non-migrants within transnational social spaces.

## **6 Discussion: 'home' and 'belonging'**

In this paper I trace the evolution of an analytical framework that seeks to understand the everyday realities of one group of African migrants and their descendants in Britain today. Thinking through notions of 'home' and 'belonging' for migrants and their descendants requires us to think through and against a range of spaces and places that reflect the complexity of registers that migrants occupy. In this section I want to give a vignette of how utilising the concept of diasporic landscape as central to the theoretical framework can enable one to capture 'texts' that reveal the negotiated and at times fluid nature of migrants' everyday practices. 'Home' and 'belonging' need to be considered not only as the relationship between place and space – but within and through time (Blunt and Dowling 2006; King and Christou 2008; Rapport and Dawson 1998). This brings to the fore the need to adopt a critical perspective to dichotomous terms such as the migrant/non-migrant; internal/international migrant; host/sending country. The nature of borders and boundaries is both geo-political and cultural and subject to a fluid interpretation when the temporal dimension is also brought into play.

It is important to note what migrants' own expressions and understandings reveal about their own socio-cultural struggles over who belongs in what space and place. Within the Ugandan community migrants' narrative 'texts' reveal the at times contradictory ways in which they negotiate 'home' and 'belonging'. John, below, is a first-generation migrant who after more than 20 years in Britain lives modestly, suffering from deskilling in a job not commensurate with his training as a civil engineer. Once a refugee he now has British citizenship yet puts forward a revolving argument that I heard many times during field work. In expressing his thoughts on cultural identity and citizenship in Britain he conflates the

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<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, Mercer (2002) favours a conceptualisation that begins with a view of landscapes as 'contested networks of material-semiotic relationships, ... (both the work of hands and minds) ... provisional alliances between people and things, and contested representations viewed from a necessarily situated perspective' (2002: 42). He suggests a strengthening of this dialectic tension by incorporating 'the agency of the landscape itself, animated by the ongoing struggles over both a landscape's material-semiotic territory and semiotic-material meaning' (2002: 42).



predicament of internally displaced people (IDPs) and internal migrants in the central region of Uganda, *Buganda* from where he originates with the plight of new migrants (documented or undocumented) in Britain. He contrasts the two situations through the motif of 'polluting' what he terms as 'desirable' about Britain, i.e. its ethnic integrity and embodied 'ethics':

*Even worse is a person to say to you that they are British but you can see that they are not British, and they've started telling you what you can and cannot do. What you can and cannot do when you are in your own home. That's why us the Baganda<sup>3</sup> it hurts us. When a person [a non-Muganda] comes and they say asinze mu Buganda [they've done the best in Buganda], we praise them. We praise them. We used to do that willing, we now do it unwilling but that's a factor, those things happen. Because when he [the migrant] comes and says – not only have you allowed me to stay here, but I don't want the Kabakaship [i.e. don't want to respect the Buganda King and Kingdom]. Has he got a right to say that? Just because we let him stay and now he is calling himself Mukasa [a common Buganda name] or whatever? That hurts. I want the one who comes [the migrant] to agree that he is a visitor and that we can say to him that visitors can up to here as far as the reception room, they cannot enter the inner rooms, and he accepts that.*

John's case oscillates between envisioning the population of Britain and Uganda in narrow categories of migrants, co-ethnics and 'others'. The notion of migration control and policing of borders is at the forefront of his argument. He unproblematically draws on what he perceives to be happening in Buganda to express his sympathy with those in Britain who see migrants as a cause of concern, both in their increasing demand for rights and in their 'polluting' of what is desirable about one's place. Furthermore he issues a warning of why Britain should stay attentive to the consequences of open-door immigration and rights-based policies, which can dilute the norms and values that the country is built on. In his analysis Britain could cease to be desirable and struggle to attract or retain the brightest and best talent.

*Unless you're protective everyone is going to start to abuse it [your land/country]. Then others will start to say that it is no longer desirable. It's only desirable because you've actually kept it good. If you let everyone come in and let everyone do whatever they please, it won't be desirable anymore. I'm not sure in 30 or 50 years time England will be desirable, or America. You could find yourself that what is desirable is back home. In terms of where should I migrate? Because when certain ethics, which made this thing desirable no longer hold eventually it won't be desirable.*

My research utilises the notion of 'home' and 'belonging' as an important site through which to trace migrants self-articulated engagement with their lived realities in Britain. Both 'home' and 'belonging' have formal and informal aspects, are multi-scaled, multi-spatial and multi-dimensional in manifestation (Akinwumi 2006; Mallett 2004; Mee and Wright 2009). 'Home' and 'belonging' can incorporate a wide range of phenomena, scales and positionalities as we see above in John's narrative. The question therefore is: can 'home' –

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<sup>3</sup> The *Baganda* is the ethnic group that dominates the central region of Uganda that also hosts the capital Kampala. Their Kingdom is called *Buganda*, the King is called the *Kabaka* and the term *Muganda* refers to an indigene of *Buganda*.

and I would add 'belonging' – be understood as '(a) place(s), (a) space(s), feeling(s), practices, and/or a state or state of being in the world?' (Mallett 2004: 65). 'Home' and 'belonging' can be expressed through place and space in its physically bounded material form (Blunt and Dowling 2006); what on the nation state level we would refer to as Britain and Uganda. On the household scale 'home' and 'belonging' is bounded by the physical boundary encapsulated in the four walls where the migrant/non-migrant resides, whether that be the bricks and mortar of a luxury tropical villa or the crowded shared bedsit on an inner city London council estate. This bounded unit is not fixed and can have a mobility component because you can move with your household, values, beliefs and prejudices within your networks. In this way movement or migration does not necessarily equate to the loss or destabilisation of all physical and symbolic aspects of 'home' and 'belonging'.

There are several important interlinked material and embodied conceptualisations of 'home' and 'belonging' as they pertain to the documentation or blood that confers identity, drawing on concepts of origins and destinations, citizen and non-citizen. This concept of 'home' and 'belonging' as Salih notes is both articulated through the rights that the state confers and the structural framework, 'the legal, socio-economic and political tools that the state creates to deal with [migrants'] presence at the national and local levels' (2003: 3). These are 'important sites to investigate in order to highlight the qualitative difference between the transnationalism of different social groups' (Salih 2003: 3). This framework impacts and limits migrants' possibilities to enter, reside or claim citizenship and for those who fall outside this remit offers exclusion or undocumented status. It also reflects the complex question of how 'transnational migrants conceive of more than one "home", with competing allegiances changing through time?' (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 8)

So, 'where is home?' as Avtar Brah poses (1996: 192). 'When does a location become home? What is the difference between "feeling at home" and staking claim to a place as one's own?' (Brah 1996: 193) The concept of 'betwixt and between' (Grillo 2007) can represent both physical and symbolic liminality. There are many who fall into this 'gap' such as the failed Ugandan asylum seekers or the undocumented who do not have 'papers' but still feel Britain is 'home' or where they 'belong'. Similarly, there are those who lack social networks in Uganda and are unable to feel at 'home' or that they 'belong' although they can legally claim dual citizenship. There are also those who are born in Britain, one could say into this liminality, but who refuse to accept it. Here, Abwoli, a 29-year-old second-generation professional woman born in Britain to Ugandan refugee parents, voices what I heard on many occasions. Interestingly, her words also reflect what I heard from older migrants who had naturalised as British citizens:

*I always [her emphasis] say that I am Ugandan although I carry a British passport. Who you are on the inside is never dictated by what passport you carry.*

It is not only the state that patrols borders and fixes boundaries. This is a feature of many migrant communities as we saw from John's quote above – when located in London he summons up the reality of a traditionalist Muganda drawing on reference points from the UK and Ugandan context to make the case for the 'purity' of Buganda. As some scholars have noted in their research, this sense of border control is central to some migrant communities; Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) show how an emphasis on essentialism and re-inscribing, both physically and symbolically, of allegiance to the 'homeland' has become

central to key sectors of the 'Eritrean' diaspora. However, boundaries are both contested and negotiated, open to transgression by the very nature of the transnational activities migrant 'communities' engage with. Stuart Hall, in the context of racism, highlights how the positioning of black people can construct 'impassable symbolic boundaries between racially constituted categories' (1990). These boundaries attempt to mark, fix and naturalise the difference between those who belong and the 'other' (Hall 1990). Both these insights are relevant to my enquiry into 'home' and 'belonging' within a 'community' that not only carries the legacy of politicised identity, but continues to struggle with its ramifications in diaspora as Anthony, one of my informants reflects:

*I grew up in that period when Uganda got independence. I experienced seeing the divisions between parties on religious lines, on tribal lines, on clan lines, nepotism, openly. Straightforward without hiding. That's what used to be the practice, I grew up in that. I've not found [pause] any evidence to show that some of those things are not carrying on now [in Britain and Uganda].*

Sandra, who I met at the Luganda (the indigenous language of the Baganda) church service, narrated why she felt that her experience of exile and that of many people from Buganda was intimately tied up with the war and social inequalities that northern Uganda suffers from. However, she felt strongly that mothers had a role in reconstructing the social fabric of Uganda, in how they raised future generations, disabusing them of stereotypes tied to ethnicity that fed an insidious racism internal to the community:

*People are too organised around their tribal groups [in Britain]. At the moment that's how they organise and it's a spillover from the legacy of home. And I think that's why I'm saying that we are still amateurs [as a migrant community]. From some of us, there needs to emerge some leadership to start making the connections. ... For example, in the issue of these children in the war situation, we should be thinking that that child could have been you or me. You did not decide to be the daughter of Binaisa, I did not decide to be the daughter of Mukasa or whatever, by accident you are a daughter of Binaisa. It's a lottery! By accident you could have been born in Gulu and not only that you could have been born in Gulu during the last ten years, how would you feel if you were in that situation? ... you don't have to be an Acholi to care. You just need to be a Ugandan and that's all.*

Here the fragmented nature of 'who belongs', 'who should we care about' illustrates entrenched social inequalities stemming from colonial times whose impact resonates across oceans and time into the diaspora. 'Home' and 'belonging' is denoted through symbolic and socio-historical categorisations of place and space that nevertheless give rise to material structures that have very real bearings on migrants and non-migrants' lives (Hall 1990). In this category I include such concepts as class, race and ethnicity. Zack-Williams and Mohan expand on this and make an important point that:

*... certain identities are not "negotiable" and become important axes of political and cultural belonging. In all cases we need to situate discourses about Africa, identity and belonging (such as Afrocentrism and Pan-Africanism) within the context of a diaspora in which racism plays a central part (2002: 206).*

There is a suggestion that the nature of 'home' and 'belonging' could be in between and within communities as migrants' transnational practices and social spaces offer possibilities

of a re-configuration of both 'home' and 'belonging' as identity and gender dynamics come to the fore. The texts that contour the diasporic landscape highlight the sensorial and at times mobile texture of 'home' and 'belonging'; what has been reflected through the notion of 'roots' and 'routes' (Clifford 1997; Gilroy 1996).

## 7 Conclusion

Within migrants' lifespan in Britain and Uganda are many 'migration stories' – texts that reflect their migration decision and the lives they craft in diaspora. In my data these African migrants articulate fluid positionalities as well as at times fixed subjectivities. They draw on historical and social references that reflect tangible material impacts within their everyday lived realities. A poignant example is data I gathered on migrants' self-articulations of their migration experience. Ugandan migrants typically framed their personal life narrative as a quest to secure sanctuary, study and/or work. What we see is a process of negotiation, articulation and embodiment on a range of levels. It is a process with important temporal dimensions both because it reveals the impact on the present of past social history, and the need to still make sense of this heritage within migrants' lived realities in Britain.

Narrations are powerful because they give access to the migrants' own 'voice'. However, these 'texts' are not as transparent as this claim to 'voice' implies (Tierney and Lincoln 1997). As my participants attempt to paint a picture of their lives for my ear, the partiality in the very telling of their story becomes clear to both of us. The broad range of data that informed this multi-sited ethnography from virtual to participant observation and archival material provides the 'texts' that contour their diasporic landscape; a landscape composed of fluid centres and borders that highlights the persistent centrality of the sending context, asymmetric power relations, the socially constructed nature of their experiences and the pain, choice and agency in re-membering (hooks 1990; 1996). The sending context persists even for those in the 'community' who reject connection with Uganda as they draw negative counter-narratives to re-frame their lives in relation to this abandoned heritage. If we adopt an inter-disciplinary theoretical framework that draws on transnationalism *and* the concept of diasporic landscape we are better able to apprehend migrants' interface and acts within and across transnational social spaces. African migrations stretch far back in millennia and everyday practices of 'home' and 'belonging' reveal the multi-layered contours of this coeval diasporic landscape.

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