Aside from the characteristic urban pattern of high, middle, and low-income areas, Nairobi’s postcolonial landscape is also layered by localities with predominant ethnic communities. With over fifty ethnic communities in Kenya, Nairobi as the primary urban locality has sections exhibiting variant cultural styles in built landscape and activities producing multiple identities in place. Eastleigh North, a locality situated 15km north of the central Business District is one such area, represented by all Kenyan ethnicities and emerging as an enclave to members of the Somali community.

This study explores how the context of cultural shifts in Eastleigh North have influenced and determined the spatial landscape of the area. The spatiality of culture and the built environment has origins as an Asian suburb in pre-independence Nairobi and later as a multi-ethnic locality. Today, the majority of its population constitutes members of the Somali community who have transformed what was once a residential area into a thriving commercial district.

Using a multidimensional approach involving segregation measurement, household interviews, in depth discussion and mapping we differentiate cultural manifestations in the built environment based on ethnicity. Outcomes from the study reveal the diversity in Eastleigh North can be conceptualized in four significant ways; ethnic, religious, economic and social. The implications of which are, planning for multicultural communities should embrace cultural difference as a valid organizing force and where possible, given legitimacy without compromising the need for overall common good. The study suggests that ethnic enclave formation should be considered for its positive attributes although planning intervention may be needed to prevent total exclusion. The study also outlines how public spaces such as streets, pavements, and parks can seriously influence multicultural engagement and inclusions.