Geographies of commercial sex reveal how sex workers are socially and spatially impacted by macro-level processes and power dynamics. This presentation analyses how migrant female sex workers at the street level in Naivasha, Kenya experience in their everyday lives the society and the state, law, policy, and development programs in gendered and unequal ways. Drawing on feminist ethnographic research in Naivasha’s red light district, the stratified sex worker community and sex worker governance, criminalization, and stigmatization experienced at the street level are presented. While the global sex workers’ rights and anti-trafficking movements result in polarized development programming for migrant sex workers, HIV/AIDS peer education and the rescue industry overlap and play out in complex ways at the street level. Female sex workers navigate this geography of street level sex work strategically, especially through their mobility patterns and the use of mobile phones. This presentation highlights how processes of both power and resistance shape the lived experiences of migrant female sex workers in street level sex work and challenges how gender, space, and place are conceived in African sex work research.

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