

**DETOURNEMENT OF SEDUCTIVE
SPACES: URBAN RENEWAL AMIDST
GENTRIFICATION IN NAIMA
COSTER'S *HALSEY STREET* AND LISA
BRAXTON'S *THE TALKING DRUM***

BY

SYED FAKHAR UL HASNAIN FATIMI



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

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Thesis Title: Détournement of Seductive Spaces: Urban Renewal Amidst Gentrification in Naima Coster's Halsey Street and Lisa Braxton's The Talking Drum

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ABSTRACT

Title: Détournement of Seductive Spaces: Urban Renewal Amidst Gentrification in Naima Coster’s *Halsey Street* and Lisa Braxton’s *The Talking Drum*

The present study focuses on how the process of gentrification disrupts the spatial structures, economic equilibrium and community-centric cultural development that are often considered paramount for an inclusive and vibrant urban space. The novels selected for the scrutiny are *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster and *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton. The gentrified spaces are aestheticized and as put by Christoph Lindner Gerard F. Sandoval, are converted into “seductive spaces”, that offer trendy establishments and a renewed urban ambiance. However, the detrimental effects brought by gentrification are always lurking behind, which shatter economic equilibrium, spatial structures, and inclusivity. The afore-mentioned novels have been scrutinized under the lens of the theoretical framework expounded out of Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval’s book *Aesthetics of Gentrification: Seductive Spaces and Exclusive Communities in the Neoliberal City* (2021), integrating it with Jane Jacobs’ *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), who serves as the second key theorist. Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval are co-authors of this book and give a survey about how embellishment of gentrified spaces takes place, resulting in their conversion into seductive spaces. Meanwhile, Jane Jacobs proposes the urban planning fundamentals and the features of urban spaces that are cardinal to cater the needs of its residents, and for the creation of a vibrant and inclusive urban space. The research aims to unearth the adversities brought by gentrification, and the attempt to mask them through the process of aestheticization, by carrying out the textual analysis of the selected texts. This research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of gentrification’s societal implications through literary lenses, informing future scholarly discussions and critiques of urban development.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents for their love, endless support, and encouragement. I also dedicate this thesis to my late grandfather, the most significant figure in my life, whose profound wisdom and guidance have been instrumental in shaping my intellect, character, and values. Though he is no longer with us, his memory remains a cherished part of my journey. Additionally, I dedicate this work to the memory of my dear friend, Raja Umair Azhar, who was a steadfast source of support for me. He also departed from this mortal world, but this work is a testament to the lasting impact he had on my life.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study examines how gentrification disrupts spatial structures, economic equilibrium, and community-centric cultural development—elements essential for an inclusive and vibrant urban space. Through an analysis of *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster and *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton, the research explores the aestheticization of gentrified spaces, transforming them into "seductive spaces" with trendy establishments and a renewed urban ambiance, as theorized by Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval in *Aesthetics of Gentrification: Seductive Spaces and Exclusive Communities in the Neoliberal City* (2021). Jane Jacobs' insights from *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) further inform the study, emphasizing the fundamentals of urban planning for vibrant and inclusive neighborhoods. Integrating these frameworks, the research unveils the concealed adversities of gentrification, exposing the displacement and exclusion that aestheticization seeks to obscure.

The term gentrification was initially introduced by an urban sociologist Ruth Glass in her work *London: Aspects of Change* (1964). It is a multifaceted and complex social, economic, and urban phenomenon that involves the arrival of a wealthier, affluent individuals or groups into a previously lower-income neighbourhood, leading to the alteration of neighbourhood's character, demographics, and overall development. This process leads to elevated property values, increased rents, and changes in the cultural and social fabric of the area. The theorists for the present study Lindner and Sandoval center their argument on the scrutiny of how gentrification is intertwined with the creation of visually aesthetic spaces, and their conversion into seductive spaces that allure the local residents along with s as well. Gentrification offers a prospect of revitalized neighbourhoods adorned with trendy establishments that are congruent to the contemporary tastes and can resonate with the masses. The gentrified spaces are aestheticized with trendy establishments and a renewed urban ambiance. Meanwhile, the tribulations brought by it are often concealed that result in the disintegration of communal cohesion, cultural authenticity, inclusivity, and the sense of shared identity. This leads to the conversion of residential

areas into exclusive enclaves, as the challenges of inclusivity and inequality gradually arise, leading to a fractured locality.

Lindner and Sandoval center their inquiry on how these aesthetically pleasing spaces are used to attract wealthier residents, contributing to the transformation of urban landscapes and social dynamics.

The second key theorist for this research is Jane Jacobs. Often referred to as an urbanist, Jane Jacobs carried out her duties diligently as an urban critic and urban activist. She made significant contributions to the understanding of the dynamics of city life, urban design, and community development. Her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) revolves around her critique of prevailing urban planning practices. In this book, she advocates mixed-use neighbourhoods, organic economic growth, and local community engagement in the nourishment of culture, diverse building ages, and vibrant street life. She fosters the notion of local community involvement in urban development. She also underscores the significance of safeguarding cultural heritage and its preservation through the engagement of local residents to ensure its organic evolution. Her work provides profound insights into urban planning, community development and dynamics of city life. Thus, to get better acquaintance with the challenges posed by gentrification, she acts as the second key theorist in this research.

The major theorists for this study, Lindner and Sandoval, provide an insight about the process of gentrification and the creation of visually appealing spaces for the process of aestheticization. On the other hand, Jacobs' work provides a fulcrum to this research to envisage the ramifications brought by this process of gentrification. The fundamentals underscored by her like gradual accumulation of wealth with the involvement of local enterprises rather than “cataclysmic money” (Jacobs 293), mixedneighbourhood use in terms of spatial structures and arrangement, and communitycentric cultural development for the flourishing of vital and authentic culture, are all contravened through the process of gentrification resulting in the formation of exclusive enclaves; bringing in disruption in inclusivity and social equality.

The first text this study aims to explore is *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster. She is a contemporary American novelist acclaimed for her poignant

exploration of identity, family dynamics, and cultural nuances. Coming from a multicultural background, readers develop a strong association with her work as her writings resonate with the masses by delving into the complexities of diverse characters and their experiences. Her novel *Halsey Street* (2018) centers around Penelope Grand who is an artist in her 20s and returns back to her childhood home in Halsey Street in a gentrified Brooklyn neighbourhood named Bedford-Stuyvesant. After her return, she feels estranged from her family members. She tries to cope with the complexities of her family history, but senses complete estrangement from her community due to the adversities brought by the tide of gentrification. She tries to confront the challenges and navigate her own artistic aspirations, strained relationships, and the stressful challenge of balancing the past with her present ambitions. The novel explores themes of identity, belonging, gentrification, and the intricate relationships that shape our lives.

The second text study aims to explore is *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton. She is also a contemporary American writer with a background in Literature and Public Relations. Her works delve into themes of community, identity, and personal growth. Her works also resonate with the masses as she crafts her works through experiences relatable for the audience. Braxton's writing prompts reflection on life's challenges and triumphs. Her novel *The Talking Drum* (2020) comprises a captivating storyline, skilfully crafting two parallel narratives unfolding the lives of two couples. Sydney and Malachi, the first couple, aspires to build a bookstore and cultural center, which they triumphantly establish, but only to get sabotaged later due to the aftermaths of gentrification. Simultaneously, the novel delves into the lives of Omar Bassari and Natalie. Natalie aspires to be an actress, whereas Omar is a top-notch drummer. Nonetheless, as the urban renewal hits their neighbourhood, their aspirations get sidelined and the relationship gets strained. Both the couples also suffer with the complexities of preserving their family's legacy, and also struggle with the challenges that societal changes bring in the neighbourhood. The novel skillfully explores the themes of identity, heritage, and the profound impact of gentrification on communities. Through richly drawn characters and their evolving relationships, this novel provides a great insight about the evolving landscapes of both physical spaces, as well as personal histories.

Through the scrutiny of the selected texts, the study aims to unearth the ramifications brought by gentrification and their aestheticization to mask the tribulations brought by it. For this, along with Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval, Jane Jacobs serves as a second key theorist to give a profound insight into urban development, community engagement and dynamics of city life. Hence, her work provides an assistance to unearth the disruption that gentrification brings in spatial structures, economic equilibrium and community-centric cultural development, that are often observed as essentials in urban geography. The novels selected for the scrutiny turn out to be détournement of the gentrified spaces, subverting their typical representation. The titular word détournement is a concept in art and cultural theory that involves diverting or repurposing existing elements of media, advertisements, or art and placing it into a different context to create new, often subversive meanings. McKenzie Wark explains it as the opposite of quotation (Wark 40). Therefore, these novels can be seen as a détournement of the seductive spaces in a metaphorical sense, as they take the existing elements of the gentrification and repurpose them to alter their meanings and expose the ramifications lurking behind the aesthetic facade of them.

1.1. Thesis Statement

In Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* (2018) and Lisa Braxton's *Talking Drum* (2020), the gentrification of spaces brings along "cataclysmic money" that disrupts economic equilibrium, spatial structures and community-centric cultural development, resulting in the disintegration of communal cohesion, inclusivity, cultural diversity, and the sense of shared identity.

1.2. Research Questions

1. In what ways are gentrified spaces aestheticized to mask the tribulations brought by the process of gentrification in the selected fiction?
2. How does the "cataclysmic money" brought in by gentrification disrupt the economic equilibrium of the urban space in the selected fiction?
3. How does gentrification disrupt the spatial structures and community-centric cultural development?

1.3. Significance of the Study

This research holds significant academic value due to its interdisciplinary approach, drawing upon insights from the fields of Sociology and Urban Geography. By employing a multifaceted lens, it explores the underlying causes of gentrification, aesthetics of gentrification and repercussions of residing in gentrified spaces. Moreover, it examines the core elements of an equitable and dynamic urban environment, as well as the changes induced by the process of gentrification. It also strives to do a thorough examination of the lived experiences of both marginalized communities and the more affluent strata of society.

In contemporary times, the trend of living in housing societies has drastically increased, making gentrification a conspicuous and tangible phenomenon. This research endeavour seeks to serve as a critical resource for individuals who are directly or indirectly being impacted by this complex socio-economic shift, offering fresh perspectives and potential avenues for reimagining their lives in the midst of this multifaceted phenomenon. Along with it, this study touches on the complex phenomenon of urban development and the adversities brought by gentrification, leading to the disruption in the fundamentals of equitable urban space. It also attempts to unveil the attempts to mask these ramifications by aestheticizing the gentrified spaces. The scrutiny of these matters is invaluable for casting light on the often overlooked consequences of urban redevelopment. It is significant for the provision of valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and social advocates. Through this research, we can better understand the dynamics of urban change and work towards creating more equitable and inclusive communities. It also holds significance for the masses to develop better understanding of the widespread effects of gentrification, as it traces the subtle ways in which the neighbourhoods and lives of individuals might be influenced by it. Furthermore, this research will open a new gate to literary research providing the theoretical framework for future studies. By establishing a robust theoretical framework, it lays the foundation for future scholarly inquiries in this domain.

Furthermore, these novels have received relatively limited research attention. Overall, the broader theme of gentrification has received some attention, however, lots of facets and repercussions demand extensive scrutiny from different vantage points

within the academic discourse of literature. Consequently, this study aims to fulfil this discernible gap by conducting this extensive scrutiny of gentrification and its violation of equitable urban essentials. Furthermore, this study aims to conduct a rigorous examination of the process of aestheticization, and its deployment as a tool to conceal the tribulations brought by the gentrifying forces. This discernible gap within the existing body of academic knowledge presents an opportunity for investigation which this study intends to fulfil.

1.4. Delimitation

This study is delimited to the selected novels *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster and *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton. The theoretical framework is expounded out of Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval's development on gentrification in their book *Aesthetics of Gentrification* (2021). Whereas, Jane Jacobs provides the fundamentals of an inclusive urban space in her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) and serves as the second key theorist for this study. The context of this study is delimited to the aestheticization of gentrification and the role of gentrifying forces in bringing tribulations for the long-established residents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The texts under scrutiny for this study are *Halsey Street (2018)* by Naima Coster and *The Talking Drum (2020)* by Lisa Braxton. Both these texts serve as focal points for the exploration of the pervasive theme of gentrification and its far-reaching consequences. They delve into multifarious themes of identity, family dynamics, and cultural nuances within contemporary American society. *Halsey Street (2018)* explores the life of Penelope Grand, an artist in her 20s who is grappling with estranged family relationships on her return to gentrified Brooklyn, her childhood home, and faces the arduous challenges of balancing her artistic ambitions with her past. Whereas, *The Talking Drum (2020)* weaves two parallel narratives forming the core of the story, tracing the lives of two couples. The first couple is Sydney and Malachi Stallworth, while Omar Bassari and Natalie are the second couple, who struggle with the challenges posed by the societal changes brought by the process of gentrification and its effects on their families in the fictional city of Bellport, Massachusetts. Both novels skillfully explore themes of identity, heritage, belonging, and the evolving landscapes of both physical spaces and personal histories amidst the backdrop of societal changes. They elucidate how gentrification ravages the ideals of inclusivity, resulting in the formation of exclusive enclaves. Through a meticulous analysis, these literary works delve into the multifaceted dimensions of this societal issue, with a particular focus on the marginalization of local communities.

Remarkably, there exists a notable gap in scholarly research, despite the richness of these texts in highlighting the complexities of gentrification and its implications for urban spaces. No academic inquiry exists that investigates these texts through the lenses of gentrification, urban planning, or the infringement upon the fundamental principles of urban planning amidst the process of gentrification. Additionally, given the contemporary nature of these literary works, their overall body of scholarship remains notably underexplored, with limited attention from researchers across various disciplines.

Gentrification is one of the salient features of contemporary urban dynamics. However, it remains a relatively underexplored theme in the realm of literature. The selected texts for this study provide a fertile ground to the researchers to fill the gap

and navigate through the intricacies of gentrification and its intersection with urban planning and urban geography. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap by exploring how the tribulations brought by gentrification are masked with the attempt to aestheticize them by embellishment of gentrified spaces through trendy establishments and a revitalized urban ambiance, which creates a hoax for the residents who envision a promising future in those gentrified spaces. For this, Lindner and Sandoval's work *Aesthetics of Gentrification (2021)* provides a great insight about the process of gentrification and attempts to aestheticize the gentrified spaces to conceal its ramifications. Whereas, Jane Jacobs work on urban planning and urban geography, provides a profound insight about the fundamentals of an inclusive and vibrant urban space. For the investigation of disruptions brought by gentrification, Jacobs' work provides a befitting material for integrating it with Linder and Sandoval's findings. Hence, this research synthesizes Lindner and Sandoval's examination of the aesthetic dimensions of gentrification with Jane Jacobs' work on urban planning and urban geography.

Regina Marie Mills explores Naima Coster's *Halsey Street (2018)* in *Beyond Resistance in Dominican American Women's Fiction: Healing and Growth through the Spectrum of Quietude in Angie Cruz's Soledad (2001) and Naima Coster's Halsey Street (2021)*. The article investigates Angie Cruz's *Soledad (2001)* and Naima Coster's *Halsey Street (2018)* within the context of Dominican American literature. Mills asserts that these novels offer a counter-archive that focuses on women-centered narratives of return. These narratives are characterized by feminized forms of expression and belonging, such as art, quietness, secrecy, surrender, and interiority. Mills argues that these texts reassert the power, as well as importance of these actions and spaces, portraying a spectrum of quietude that ranges from acts of isolation to tools for building connections, healing, and personal growth. Hence, she shows how this approach dismantles the traditional narratives associated with Dominican Republic and Dominican America, which focused mostly on the themes like Trujillo's regime and masculine identity, by exhibiting the resilience and agency of Dominican American women through alternative forms of expression and belonging.

Under the rule of Rafael Trujillo, the history and literature of The Dominican Republic mostly draw their attention towards the themes of masculinity and politics.

Julia Álvarez, Junot Díaz and other writers explored how Dominican women writers act as rebels against Trujillo and his oppressive ideas about manhood. However in this article, Mills explores *Soledad* (2001) by Angie Cruz and *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster, which tell stories about Dominican American women in a different way altogether. Mills asserts that these two novels deploy themes like art, quiet moments, secrecy, and personal reflection to show how women find strength and connection. Instead of loud rebellion, they showcase the power of quiet and personal spaces for healing and growth which is an unconventional way of a rebellion. For this, Mills draws on theoretical underpinnings from various scholars like Kevin Quashie, Carlos Ulises Decena and Dixia Ramirez.

In earlier writings, writers like Julia Alvarez and Junot Diaz depicted women resisting the oppressive power of Rafael Trujillo, and portrayed characters who fought against his violent version of masculinity; challenging his oppression and tyranny. Hence, their methodology of disassembling traditional notions of masculinity had been traditional. However, writers like Angie Cruz and Naima Coster take a completely different tack. By their divergent approach, they portray characters who rather than challenging in conventional terms, find their solace in the power of quiet, personal space and introspection as argued by Mills. In *Soledad* (2001), the eponymous protagonist Soledad finds her solace in art and introspection and paints and reflects on her inner world. This helps her develop a profound understanding of deeper things and also help her in grasping the gist of her family's struggle which enables her to heal from past traumas. Similarly, the other protagonist Penelope from *Halsey Street* (2018) deals with her tumultuous relationship with her mother through personal reflection and quiet moments. She bonds with her family through these quiet acts and develops a sense of belonging. She is often found spending time in renovating her mother's house which not only rejuvenates the physical space around her but also becomes a way of her reconnection and healing. Silence and secrecy, rather than weapons to be wielded against women, also become tools for Dominican and Dominican American women's agency. "The feminine interior becomes a space for thoughtful contemplation and healing" (Mills 404). These acts, although commonly perceived as feminine and private, are utilized as tools by the writers in reclamation of power. Rather than loud and direct confrontation, these texts focus on

the power of introspection, quiet and other creative acts as a form of rebellion as well as strength.

Mills builds upon the work of Quashie who distinguishes quiet from silence. Silence may be perceived as suppression, meanwhile quiet is a presence that may include meaningful actions and emotions. “Quiet, on the other hand, is presence (one can, for example, describe prose or a sound as quiet) and can encompass fantastic motion” (Quashie 22). Hence, Mills recognizes quietude and silence as part of a continuum. She positions secrecy, surrender, and art at various points along this spectrum. These actions are fully capable of fostering healing and growth, as well as on the other hand, can lead to silencing and estrangement. Hence, these texts move beyond the quintessential narratives of resistance, deploying art, introspection and quiet as tools for healing and growth.

Mills further validates her argument by pinpointing that both the texts make use of visual arts as their focal points, which is anomalous to the traditional Dominican art that centers on poetry. Moreover, both the protagonists joining the art school despite opposition from their families depicts their financial stability, independence and resolute nature. Furthermore, their art creates a space of introspection and quiet for both the protagonists, which they deploy as a medium of coping mechanism.

The notions raised by Mills are well backed by arguments and staunch theoretical foundations. Her proposal is unique, insightful and thought provoking backed by unwavering arguments. However, the present study follows a completely distinct trajectory from her work. Her work centers upon Dominican and Dominican American women expounding her theoretical underpinnings from Black feminist theory and queer studies scholarship, whereas her methodology involves historical and contextual analysis along with cultural criticism situating the novels within historical and cultural contexts. Hence, the current study bears no resemblance with her work in terms of methodology, scope or argument and recontextualizes the text in a different perspective altogether. Mills directs her attention towards portrayal of female identity in these texts, whereas the current study is concerned with the politics of gentrification and its interconnection with the changes taking place in an urban space.

Apart from Mills, the novels under scrutiny have hardly undergone any academic research given their contemporary nature. However, gentrification and overall modes of urban planning have been examined by quite a few scholars. Starting with James Peacock, he explores three novels in terms of gentrification in his article *Those the Dead Left Behind: Gentrification and Haunting in Contemporary Brooklyn Fictions* (2019). Peacock delves into three novels named as *The Astral* (2011) by Kate Christensen, *Visitation Street* (2013) by Ivy Pochoda and *Another Brooklyn* (2016) by Jacqueline Woodson, all of which can be deemed as ghost stories. Although Pochoda's novel includes traditional ghost story elements, all the novels Peacock explores can be regarded as ghost stories as they are dealing with exclusion and invisibility. However, Peacock affirms the usage of ghosts is emblematic which is interconnected with social change and transformation. Peacock elucidates that these hauntings reveal how gentrification relies on marginalization and occlusion, highlighting the ongoing social impacts. He discusses Jonathan Lethem's view regarding Brooklyn, who perceives Brooklyn as a place where in spite of the attempts of modernization and gentrification, the past becomes adhesive and lingers on. Memory and history remain visible in Brooklyn, which makes Peacock interested in how this interplay between the material and the abstract becomes evident in the contemporary Brooklyn fiction. His research is an exploration of hauntings in these fictions, and specially the fact that gentrification in Brooklyn is depicted through both physical changes as well as spectral elements, which suggests that becoming oblivious to the past is inexorable; the material transformations rely on and coexist with memories and ghosts.

Peacock argues that scrutinizing these texts through the lens of haunting provides insight into economic effects of gentrification and how the power dynamics are at play, which allows a deeper understanding of the neighbourhood changes. He claims that there are spiritual consequences of a neighbourhood change which are unable to be grasped through purely objective analysis. He refers to Raymond Williams's concept of "structures of feeling" (Williams 6), to envisage how hauntings convey the lived experiences and emotional responses to social transformations. *The Astral* (2011) reflects the empirical worldview of the protagonist and his struggles amidst the changes society undergoes through. *Visitation Street* (2013) uses music to

emblemize neighbourhood interactions and the lingering presence of the dead, whereas *Another Brooklyn* (2016) links personal and communal histories to broader social changes, blending the memories and voices from the past, without referring to gentrification explicitly but hinting at its future impact. Peacock delves into the concept of authenticity, which is crucial to understanding representations of gentrification and haunting. Authenticity in Brooklyn fictions is multifaceted and often contradictory, linked to both timelessness and change. Characters in these novels strive for an authentic lifestyle, perceiving gentrification as a threat to local culture and diversity.

Peacock enunciates that the concept of authenticity is vital for the understanding of representations of gentrification and haunting. Authenticity in Brooklyn fiction is multifaceted and often contradictory, which is linked with both timelessness and change. Characters in the texts he explores, endeavour for an authentic lifestyle, perceiving gentrification as a big threat to their local culture as well as diversity. Peacock emphasizes that the process of gentrification delineates the interplay of various authenticities and competing discourses, rather than a simple before-and-after narrative.

Peacock claims that when spaces are gentrified, the memories of the past are deliberately kept to create a delusional facade of authenticity. He refers to these lingering memories of the past as “ghosts”. “I argue one must, as absent presences and thus as hauntings, then their spectral repetition is absolutely deliberate and consciously enacted as part of the gentrification process. It is an aesthetic manifestation of socioeconomic power” (Peacock 136). He marks it as “active exploitation” (Peacock 136) which is intentionally done by the powers involved in gentrification for creating a narrative of authenticity. However, lurking behind this facade of authenticity is an attempt to enhance their own socioeconomic power. In short, his scrutiny deploys the concept of haunting for the exploration and offering a nuanced understanding of gentrification in contemporary Brooklyn fiction, which highlights the complex relationship between lingering presence of the past and the material changes that are taking place.

Peacock highlights how different techniques are deployed by the writers like *The Astral* (2011) uses the restricted first-person narrative, *Visitation Street* (2013)

deploys the polyphonic voices, whereas *Another Brooklyn* (2016) makes use of fragmentary style. This all reflects and articulates the complexities of urban change and gentrification. Their characters, such as Harry Quirk from *The Astral* (2011) or August from *Another Brooklyn* (2016) navigate their identities and communities amidst these changes. They get accustomed to the affective dimensions and alternative histories that reshape their identities and their perceptions of the place. The term "ghostly" is symbolic to envisage how these narratives render visible the intangible aspects of gentrification like memory, belief, and emotion. Now, all these aspects are often sidelined or remain unacknowledged in the mainstream discourses about urban development. Gentrification may keep reshaping the neighbourhoods but these novels propose that communities are continuously evolving and retaining their complexities beyond the epidermal transformations. They dismantle the notion of a singular and linear narrative of progress by unearthing the constant interplay between past and the present, as well as memory and the material change. Peacock pleads the readers to consider the ghostly dimensions of urban change and to recognize the persistent possibilities for alternative paths and narratives within the evolving cityscape.

Peacock constructs his theoretical framework by drawing from the works of several authors, most notably Jacques Derrida and Miranda Joseph. Derrida's concept of spectrality from his work *Specters of Marx* (1994) provides him fulcrum for his scrutiny whereas Miranda Joseph's *Against the Romance of Community* (2002) assists him by providing various notions regarding how communities and economic interests are intertwined. Hence, the present study remains in stark contrast with his work in terms of scope. Peacock makes use of spectrality and hauntology to uncover his notions and moreover, he is more concerned about the memories of the past and drastic evolution of the urban space without social consensus; sidelining the original residents.

Whereas, the present study is totally divergent from Peacock's work in terms of subject matter which focuses on the aestheticization and its deployment in masking the ramifications of gentrification as well as disruption of several urban planning fundamentals. However, his work merits high praise by his unique use of hauntology and spectrality for the exploration of urban change and memory, identity and place, and many other notions.

Gabriela Cazares explores the prevalent theme of gentrification in her publication named as *Resisting Gentrification in Quiara Alegría Hudes and Lin-Manuel Miranda's In the Heights and Ernesto Quinonez's Bodega Dreams* (2017), in which she navigates through the play *In The Heights* (2008) and a novel *Bodega Dreams* (2000). *In The Heights* (2008) is a combined work of Quiara Alegría Hudes and Lin-Manuel Miranda, whereas *Bodega Dreams* is a novel produced by Ernesto Quinonez. Cazares probes how the themes of cultural preservation and community resistance are portrayed by these three authors in the wake of gentrification. She navigates through the pervasive effects of gentrification in the selected works and untangles how multigenerational Latinx communities resist the gentrification and assert their presence, as well as history through various cultural expressions, specially memorial murals. These memory murals illuminate their struggles as a community, collective history and the lived experiences. In this way, they record their protest and stand tall against their economic and political marginalization. So, these murals serve as a testament of their resistance.

In the wake of gentrification, Latinx communities face serious challenges in the form of housing insecurity, increased violence and governmental disinvestment. Cazares shows how Miranda, Hudes and Quinonez draw on their personal and lived experiences, growing up in working-class Latinx neighbourhoods to craft these stories that address this issue of gentrification. Miranda grew up in a barrio called Inwood whereas Quinonez grew up in Spanish Harlem, a neighbourhood in New York City. So, Cazares depicts how their works are a production of their lived experiences, to augment the authenticity of their work.

For the explanation of how Latinx neighbourhoods are affected by spatial segregation and gentrification, Cázares draws on the works of various scholars like Arlene Davila, who enunciates that revitalization programs are harmful for long-term residents creating socioeconomic challenges and governmental disinvestment for them. Raul Villa asserts how laws and policies impede Latinx communities from thriving, by asserting their extra control on them. However, the primary theorist used by her to build upon her argument is Henry Lefebvre. Lefebvre divides space into three major categories named as perceived space, conceived space and lived space.

She juxtaposes the idea of lived space with conceived space to indicate the impact of gentrification on barrio communities.

Lefebvre argues that space is not merely physical, but also a social construct through the activities and experiences of long-term residents. She draws on this idea to expound how gentrification transforms the conceived space of barrios or latinx neighbourhoods into something divergent from the lived experiences of the Latinx residents. Lefebvre's distinction helps her in elucidating how gentrification plunders the urban space and reshapes the neighbourhoods by pushing the long-term residents to peripheries, disrupting their social cohesion. They deliberately become oblivious to the cultural and historical significance of these spaces for Latinx communities. Cazares makes use of Lefebvre to critique how urban development undermines the lived realities and cultural integrity of barrio residents in the face of economic pressures and redevelopment projects.

Now, Cazares spotlights the significance of memorial murals in Latinx neighbourhoods. These murals are cardinal to their neighbourhood and serve as emblems of community resistance and remembrance amidst the disinvestment and marginalization in the wake of gentrification. These murals vigorously stand tall as potent symbols and as per Keva Barton and Melvin Delgado, serve as a platform for community introspection. "Memorial murals function as a means of affirming the collective history of the barrio, depicting shared struggles and lived experiences" (Cázares 89). They also become a source of the provision of discourse on the struggles faced by long-term residents in navigating unsafe environments and displacement due to skyrocketing prices. Moreover, they honor the lives lost to violence and neglect. In this way, neglecting the importance of these murals becomes insurmountable as they forge a collective historical narrative for the community. To sum up, Cazares accentuates the importance of murals which stand as resilient critiques against state powers. They celebrate cultural resilience and solidarity within the Latinx communities.

In *Bodega Dreams* (2000), Julio, the protagonist of Quinonez, starts coloring the streets as a muralist. His murals gained more and more fame and acceptability amongst his fellow community members, who even started sponsoring his expenses. Those murals were mostly memorials of deceased community members. His murals

did not only honor the lives lost but also delineated cultural symbols. He used this medium to permeate his notions across the community that educated and empowered the youth about their heritage, making them able to withstand and combat cultural invisibility that was a result of gentrification, and lack of provision of counter narrative due to substandard public school curriculum. Even Julio himself once perceived his culture as exotic. “We were almost convinced that our race had no culture” (Quinonez 3). Finally the shift comes when Julio takes the charge firsthand and starts foregrounding his murals as the emblems of his culture. Overall, murals in *Bodega Dreams* (2020) serve as powerful tools for cultural preservation and community resilience. They become a source of challenging stereotypes, and foster unity through shared cultural narratives in spite of the socio-economic challenges faced by the residents due to gentrification.

Similarly the play *In The Heights* (2008) portrays murals attaining a cardinal role in honoring community's history and cultural identity. They serve as visual tributes to the characters like Abuela Claudia, which mirrors the dissent of the neighbourhood and envisages their resilience and solidarity. For instance, the mural portraying "Paciencia y Fe", pays homage to Abuela Claudia's life and her mantra of patience and faith in spite of the adversities. While these murals emblemize unity and remembrance, they also showcase the plight of the local dwellers in the midst of gentrification and the adversities brought by it. They do provide a sense of pride, but also illuminate the urgency for a broader social and economic justice that becomes mandatory for survival, beyond these symbolic gestures.

Now, the disparity in the current study and Cazares work is self-evident on a thematic basis. Her concern is all about cultural resilience and community resistance, and specially, the use of murals as an emblem of resistance. Although she touches on the theme of gentrification and its effects that is on a surface level as the predominant concern in her research is cultural preservation and use of murals as a medium for it. Hence, the approach through which she critiques gentrification is altogether different by utilization of the theoretical framework drawn out of Henry Lefebvre, Raul Villa and Arlene Davila's works. Moreover, the argument she foregrounds in her research is also distinct. However, her work warrants condemnation for her fresh perspective and unique method of approaching gentrification with robust arguments.

Carl White delves into the intricacies of gentrification in his work *Brooklyn Gentrification and the Act of Settling in Lionel Shriver's The Mandibles* (2021). In this article, he discusses how contemporary novels set in Brooklyn often foreground the issues of gentrification and the endeavour of the original residents in keeping the authenticity of their culture intact. He scrutinizes how these themes resonate within the broader context of the United States, a nation shaped by its colonial past.

White taps into Lionel Shriver's novel *The Mandibles* (2016) and presents it as a paragon for the validation of his argument. In *The Mandibles* (2016), the characters face the arduous task to cope with the adversities in gentrifying Brooklyn and struggle to establish a new, fictional nation. He fosters that this interconnection between local gentrification and national authenticity mirrors how the changes in Brooklyn are linked to the broader historical context of the US as a colonial power. Hence he contextualizes this local gentrification and visualizes it as a reflection of broader patterns. He affirms that the gentrification in Brooklyn is closely knitted to the history of settler colonialism of the US, where settlers cruise through the local settlers, establishing their control through coercion over the original inhabitants. He perceives them as “intimately bound structures” (White 3). In *The Mandibles* (2016), this relationship is brought into the spotlight through the novel’s focus on finance and its predominantly white perspective.

In *The Mandibles* (2016), the financial crisis impels a wealthy white family to migrate. They dwell in a small house in East Flatbush, Brooklyn. Later on, they migrate again and relocate to a new nation-state in Nevada, which is depicted as a fresh start. Now, according to White, this shares some similitude with the colonial expansion in US history. The novel’s exploration of finance and its predominantly white perspective underscores these connections. White enunciates that gentrification and settler colonialism are intertwined processes. The acquisition of territory and displacement of people are predominant themes in both the processes.

In *The Mandibles* (2016), Lionel Shriver paints a dystopian picture of 2029 in which a financial collapse is imagined similar to the 2008 financial crisis. The new global currency named as the bancor surfaces in the market, however, the US president becomes adamant of not making use of it. Consequently, the US dollar collapses and the Mandible family sees their wealth crumble. Hence, this reunites

them under one roof and forces them to live together in a house in East Flatbush, a neighbourhood in Brooklyn that has undergone through the process of gentrification. Florence, one of the major characters, purchases a house there with family money. Now, that house becomes a focal point as the family migrates there as a consequence of their financial decline. The novel builds its argument on gentrification by showing how Florence and her family, despite their financial difficulties, become a major source of contribution in the changing neighbourhood dynamics. Florence perceives herself as disparate from other gentrifiers as she utilizes public transport, which is an uncommon trait amongst the wealthier newcomers.

The narrative unfolds from a perspective of the Mandible family which is white. However, their major interaction is with the majority Black residents of East Flatbush. More than often, these interactions unearth their disdain and racial bias. This presents a problematic portrayal of race in the novel that underscores both individual characters' prejudices and broader societal issues. For instance, Florence perceives her relationship with her Mexican partner as a moral choice; she augments her superiority over the Black community of the neighbourhood in her mind. Moreover, most of the white characters cast a disdainful gaze over the Black neighbourhood. The novel's racial issues manifest most evidently in the character named Luella, who is a Black woman with dementia. She becomes a victim of poor treatment and eventually gets killed by her husband. Her husband, Douglas, kills her to alleviate the family's burden. This act is disturbingly depicted as selfless, underscoring problematic handling of race and values of the society in this novel. At the end, the novel envisions a new nation-state in Nevada. The remaining family members immigrate there, further emphasizing themes of gentrification and racial inequality.

He further critiques the novel in terms of how it intertwined the themes of finance, the nation-state, and settler colonialism into its narrative. The novel sets itself in a future, where financial transactions are managed through implanted chips. It portrays the system that not only enhances security, but also enables extensive government surveillance. The characters' resentments get aggravated by high taxes that consume 77% of their income. This occasionally surfaces in acts of violence against the elderly, highlighting the disruption of social cohesion and rise of societal tensions. Some characters like Willing and Nollie's move to the United States of

Nevada (USN), operating on a gold standard with libertarian ideals, which reverberates early American settlers' quest for genuineness and autonomy. This shift is contrasted with the novel's critique of gentrification in Brooklyn, hence, it draws parallels to settler colonialism through which displacement of existing minority communities took place in favor of wealthier residents. White quotes Patrick Wolfe for the augmentation of his argument "Territoriality is settler colonialism's specific, irreducible element" (Wolfe 388). The narrative's focus on white characters and absence of Black and Indigenous perspectives provides a deep inside about its racial politics, and also critiques contemporary financial and political systems, suggesting historical repetitions and inherent inequalities.

The research undertaken by Carl White bears no resemblance with the present study in any terms. He makes use of Patrick Wolfe as his key theorist, mainly known for his work on settler colonialism, broadly relating the narrative with the broader political and historical context. His methodology is altogether disparate, contextualizing the narrative in broader history. Hence, the dependency of his argument primarily lies on the historical contextualization, as well as comparative analysis, drawing historical events such as colonization and the novel's futuristic setting to provide the societal critique and to reflect on the historical dynamics as well. Consequently, the research carried out by White differs with the present study in terms of its approach, methodology and also the argument.

Julia Sattler integrates two novels in the exploration of gentrification incorporating two novels in her chapter named as "Whose Detroit? Fictions of Land Ownership and Property in Postindustrial America", published in *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures (2021)* edited by Buchenau, Barbara, Jens Martin Gurr, and Maria Sulimma. Sattler discusses how cities like Detroit and Gary have been grappling with deindustrialization in the midst of gentrification, which leads to severe decline of the economy along with shrinkage in the population of local inhabitants. This poses a grave threat for the locals and creates an urge of rethinking the future of these areas. Sattler posits a query regarding the ownership of these abandoned industrial lands and buildings, and contemplates their future use. This results in the sparking of public debates regarding potential redevelopment, financial benefits, and the social and cultural implications of such changes. Sattler is exuberant

with the fictional novels raising this pertinent question and registering their contribution. These fictions explore the physical and emotional landscapes left behind by industrial companies.

Detroit, in particular, has been pivotal in the debates regarding gentrification due to its severe diminishing of economy resulting in financial crisis, along with the shrinkage of population composed of local inhabitants. Due to the loss of industry and population on an immense scale, Detroit's situation has been unique. The abandoned spaces of the city are now widely recognized on the global stage, often featured in books and media. Its ruination has become a focal point in the fictions also. However, Sattler perceives a deficiency of comprehensive analysis regarding novels about Detroit that address urban transformation and gentrification. To fill this gap, she delves into two novels named as *You Don't Have to Live Like This* (2015) by Benjamin Markovits, and *The Turner House* (2015) by Angela Flournoy. Markovits' novel explores the pervasive effects of gentrification in Detroit, whereas Flournoy's *The Turner House* (2015) explores the endeavour of an African American family struggling with their home in the city. Both novels provide a thoughtful insight into Detroit's present challenges and potential future. They also showcase the necessity of developing a thorough understanding of the past along with considering the social implications of urban redevelopment.

You Don't Have to Live Like This (2015) is a novel set in Detroit, a city that has undergone drastic changes as a result of gentrification, of which most notable are the downturn in the industrial sector, and the abandonment of neighbourhoods. The story unfolds through the perspective of Greg Marnier, a young white newcomer, who is part of a group attempting to create a new community in Detroit, disparaging the existing residents. This group is led by Robert James, an entrepreneur, who visualizes Detroit as a new frontier, a wild land ripe for renewal and revitalization. His thought process reminisces the historical American frontier, where the comparison of the city is drawn with wilderness that can be tamed and rebuilt. The gentrifiers perceive that space as "a war zone" (Markovits 17). Marney gets allured by the historical events like the gold rush and homesteading, and in this way, becomes an embodiment of the perspective of outsiders who come to Detroit in total oblivion to the city's history and challenges. The novel makes use of his viewpoint to foreground the challenges

attached to gentrification, where newcomers move into an area, cruising through the local residents, resulting in their exclusion from the space. Throughout the narrative, the voices of Detroit's long-term African American residents are unheard, whereas the primary focus lies on the experiences and perspectives of the gentrifiers rather than the long-term inhabitants.

The ending of the novel becomes ambiguous, with some settlers leaving while others staying. This showcases the complexities and challenges of urban redevelopment a city like Detroit posits. The novel juxtaposes the new settlers with historical colonialism, labelling the gentrifiers as colonizers of the contemporary era. Sattler severely castigates the perspectives that picture Detroit as an empty canvas for outsiders to reshape. In this way, she cautions the gentrifiers with the looming threats and highlights the persistent issues of the economy, along with racial inequalities.

Sattler also unearths the politics surrounding gentrification in Angela Flournoy's *The Turner House* (2015), which renders a narrative of an African American family of Detroit, deeply rooted in the history of the city. The plot of the novel is set against the backdrop of Detroit in 2008, and the narrative is unfolded through the third person omniscient narrator who explores the inner struggles and complex dynamics of the Turner family. Their ancestral home on Yarrow Street is foregrounded as the focal point of the narrative that symbolizes a space which is a source of provision of physical anchor to them, as well as a repository of memories. As the economy of that urban space diminishes, along with the stumbling of the housing market, the Turner family struggles to retain their cherished house in their possession.

Once the house is gone, the family indulges in traumatic experiences, and finds it hard to combat their inner demons. Their eldest son seeks therapeutic treatments, but the haunting past keeps confronting and unsettling him. The novel subtly integrates the looming threat of devastation and the presence of economic pressures that keep reshaping their neighbourhood, which results in the addition of layers of complexity to the family's feelings of security and belonging. The novel addresses the themes of land speculation and also records its criticism against the neo liberal policies. It highlights the struggles of a family in the midst of a financial crisis caused by the gentrifiers, and also depicts their enduring bonds with their heritage and

community. As the novel progresses, the Turner family ultimately confronts their challenges and also reconciles with their shared past. This becomes an emblem of Detroit's resilient nature and its ongoing quest for revitalization in the face of distress and hardships.

Through the scrutiny of these two texts set in Detroit, Sattler demystifies the adversities attached to urban development and gentrification in the city. She illustrates how these novels challenge the narrative of Detroit's recovery through economic measures like gentrification, bringing forth the emotional and affective connections people have to their homes and communities. "Both novels discussed in this essay clarify that such city planning can never offer a redemptive practice, since it cuts some people off from infrastructures, urging them to move elsewhere" (Sattler 136). However, this study is totally incongruous to the present study undertaken. Firstly, Sattler delves into complexities surrounding Detroit only, making her research exclusive to one city. Moreover, she doesn't seem to delve deeper into the intricate dynamics involved with gentrification, rather subtly hints towards the economic crisis, racial inequalities, and the displacement of the long-term inhabitants collectively. Hence, the theme and approach of her study is disparate, and additionally, confined to an exploration of a particular city and its representation in the fiction which makes her inquiry discordant to the present study.

Maria Sulimma also renders her work on gentrification in *City Scripts: Narratives of Postindustrial Urban Futures* (2021). Her chapter labeled as "To the Bodega or the Café? Microscripts of Gentrification in Contemporary Fiction" is an exploration of how gentrification, a concept tied closely to capitalism, surfaces in urban environments and its portrayal in contemporary fiction. She records her severe criticism against capitalism by enunciating "it's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" (Sulimma 138). However, she envisions gentrification, while complicated, as more conceivable to end. She suggests that our restricted ability to visualize alternatives to gentrification and capitalism affects our storytelling and narrative building against them. In literature, she notes how gentrification is mostly represented through everyday activities like buying coffee, which morphs these mundane and routine moments into powerful symbols of broader social changes.

She then touches on the concept of "subnarratable" and "supranarratable" (Warhol 222), extracted from work of Robyn R. Warhol. Subnarratable is the term that refers to everyday, seemingly trivial details or events within a narrative. On the other hand, supranarrative concerns the overarching themes, structures, or dilemmas within a narrative, that are beyond individual events or details. In contemporary fiction, mundane daily routine activities in gentrified areas like having coffees have become cardinal tools for narrative building. Sulimma labels these narrative tools as "microscripts", (Sulimma 140), which become a source of provision for insight into gentrification, without having a need of confronting its full complexity. She untangles how these short passages about subnarratable moments, or microscripts as she labels them, become armaments and assists the writers as a tool in four novels set in New York City or Oakland. They exemplify how characters' interactions with urban spaces like bodegas and cafés mirror their inclusion or exclusion from gentrified spaces, and how these seemingly mundane moments become a major driving force of the plot. She aims to unearth how these trivial everyday details in literature can make shifts in larger structures, revealing broader social and political issues.

Sulimma contrasts Ottessa Moshfegh's *My Year of Rest and Relaxation* (2018) with Tommy Orange's *There There* (2018) to investigate how characters' interaction with coffee shops and bodegas are portrayed in the novels for illustrating gentrification's broader impact. Moshfegh's novel, set in the 2000s, exhibits a wealthy young woman opting for a bodega over upscale cafes. She envisions it as a stable, working-class haven, while casting a disdainful gaze upon gentrified spaces, as she feels alienated towards them. Her choice ironically mirrors her fascination with authentic environments, while avoiding trendy locales. Similarly, in *There There* (2018), Thomas Frank, an indigenous character of Oakland, disparages the trendy revitalized urban spaces, and feels excluded by a hipster coffee shop catering to young white patrons only. He sees it as an emblem of gentrification which results in the erasure of their cultural identity, pushing them out to the peripheries resulting in their exclusion. These narratives showcase how everyday choices around coffee can be utilized as a symbol of deeper social and societal tensions, along with the identity struggles in the midst of evolving urban landscapes. Hence, the use of short passages about everyday activities or microscripts serve as an armament to the authors,

assisting them to encapsulate and unravel broader themes of gentrification and societal change in their narratives.

To further accentuate her argument, Sulimma uncovers two more fictional texts and unravels how the theme of gentrification is generally dealt in the realm of literature. Firstly, she expands upon Sarah Schulman's *Maggie Terry* (2018), in which the closure of a local bodega hints towards the complete erasure of neighbourhood culture in the wake of New York City's transformation. Maggie's transition to upscale cafés shows her unwitting complicity. Although she castigates the transformation, her unwitting shift towards upscale and trendy spaces signifies the erasure of local culture and community spaces, whereas acceptance of inauthentic, imposed culture. On the other hand, N.K. Jemisin's *The City We Became* (2020) offers a fantastical perspective on gentrification. Jemisin personifies the city of New York City, presenting it as sentient being, as if conscious of being under threat. She exhibits how specialty cafes and franchises like Starbucks serve as a tool for exploitation to the gentrifiers, and act as agents of homogenization and displacement. Hence, they are labeled as monstrous forces, a grave peril for the diversity, authenticity, and cultural richness of the city. The novel registers its severe condemnation and critiques the homogenization and displacement through humor and exaggerated scenarios, involving specialty cafes and franchises. The microscripts incorporated within these two narratives vividly elucidate the role of everyday moments in the exploration of the broader themes of urban change, unraveling its pervasive impacts on the city spaces, along with its atrocities on the local, authentic culture.

To conclude, Sulimma showcases how contemporary fiction deploys microscripts to envelop the multifarious issues of gentrification, which transgresses the simple story telling techniques. These microscripts are employed as armaments by the writers to combat the challenges regarding gentrification, by focusing on short passages exhibiting mundane everyday activities as symbols of abomination and rejection against the gentrifiers. By augmenting her notions through works of Sharon Zukin, James Peacock and Thomas Heise, Sulimma depicts how these seemingly trivial microscripts can become a source of critique for larger societal changes. However, her work is evidently disparate from the present study undertaken. Although her work merits a high praise for her unique insights, it is confined to the

use of microscripts as a narrative technique against the gentrifiers. Hence, her research is totally disparate in terms of scope, as she focuses solely on the use of microscripts as a narrative technique. However, her work deserves much appreciation for approaching the issue through unanticipated angles, encompassing detailed analysis of subnarratable microscripts and overarching supranarrative themes in literature.

Apart from these, there is hardly any scholarly inquiry regarding gentrification and its pervasive effects in the realm of literature. However, some scholars do navigate through the repercussions of urban development and urban geography, but they don't situate it in the broader spectrum of gentrification or base their inquiry around the similar notions akin to the present study. For instance, in their combined work

Architectural Reflection on Italo Calvino's Invisible Cities (2017), Bard Bajcinovci, Kaltrina Thaci and Bujar Q. Bajcinovci expound the significant challenges of contemporary urban development; especially the shortage of space for necessary urban expansion and the complex social issues enmeshed with architecture and urban planning (Bajcinovci et al. 2017). They stress the significance of addressing these challenges, considering them of paramount importance for the survival and wellbeing of both the city and the society. They exhibit urban planning as a design process aimed at protecting the environment, managing urban infrastructure as an integrated system, and enhancing the quality of urban life. Remarkably, this study draws inspiration from the novel *Invisible Cities (1972)* by Italo Calvino. The authors of this study explore a design model for high-rise structures and center their focus primarily on future urban planning concepts. They advocate for urban patterns influenced by poetic and artistic elements, which they believe can potentially address pressing urban issues like air pollution, heritage preservation, climate change, limited urban space, and public health through making use of holistic and ecologically-conscious approaches. However, the present study presents a contrasting perspective to the researches carried out in this field previously by exploring the repercussions of gentrification and integrating them with the broader issues of urban development. Hence, the present study is totally in contrast to the prior research in this field.

Similarly, Misbah Tariq, Harmain Rukh and Khush Bakht in their combined work *Cities and the Palimpsest: An Analysis of Urban Landscape in China Mieville's*

The City and the City (2020), discussed the concept of landscape and how it's exhibited in the novel *The City and The City* (2009). They underscore that the layers described in the novel are not just about the physical construction of the cities, but also include many changes and adaptations that have happened in the past and continue in the present to keep the memory of these places alive. The novel's cities are shown to have a complex urban structure shaped by various elements from different historical periods. These cities are like a special kind of book with many layers, and they hold within them the history and cultures of different times, just like a palimpsest tablet with writings from different eras. One significant point is that for citizens, it's crucial to have a connection between the past and the present for developing an understanding of who they are and where they come from. The article exemplifies multiple instances from the cities in the novel to foster how factors like industrialization and capitalism have laid their influence on these places, leading to the layering of ideas, experiences, and values over time. So, the article is exploring how the cities in the book mirror the way real cities evolve and carry the memories of their past into the present. Now, this study essentially differs from the present study in terms of its scope. It does spotlight the broader issues of urban development, but has hardly any ties with gentrification and its pervasive issues. So, the studies pertaining to the overall theme of urban development or urban geography scarcely have any chance of overlapping with the present study as solely they are not situated in the continuum of gentrification.

Sarah Brouillette probes the issues pertaining to gentrification in her publication *Literature and Gentrification on Brick Lane* (2009). However, rather than literary analysis, she situates her work under the banner of reception studies and investigates the reception of the literature produced on Brick Lane by the audience. Particularly, she centers her study on *Brick Lane* (2003) by Monica Ali as the focal point, subtly referring to some other works as well.

Brouillette claims that artists often move to gentrified areas initially because of their affordability. However, their presence further accentuates the process of gentrification, driving up the costs as their presence attracts the affluent class. Along with this, literature and cultural projects can also play a pivotal role in aggravating the gentrification by showcasing the areas as desirable and interesting. Scrutinizing the

case of Brick Lane, an area historically referred as Bangladeshi area in London's East End, has been a focus of gentrification for quite a long time. Books like Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* (2003) have become a source for drawing attention towards the area, which many claim that fueled the process of gentrification. Some local inhabitants accused Ali of their misrepresentation, whereas others deemed her work a threat for their area. The essay navigates how local community and also the community leaders reprimanded Ali's work as deemed as a threat, and accused it of misrepresentation and commodification of their culture.

She also subtly refers towards Tarquin Hall's *Salaam Brick Lane* (2005) and Rachel Lichtenstein's *On Brick Lane* (2007), exploring how these narratives capture the cultural and social transformations of the neighbourhood, delving into lives of Bangladeshi artists, s and other residents in the midst of economic and social transformations. Brouillette asserts that these works through their representation of that area inadvertently make their contribution in making Brick Lane more appealing for the masses, hence drawing attention of a wider audience, which ultimately fuels the gentrification of the area. They play a pivotal role in shaping the perception of the public, hence although accidental, their portrayal of the area potentially results in the acceleration of gentrification in those areas.

She returns back to *Brick Lane* (2003) and probes her reception within London's East End. The area was predominantly occupied by Bangladeshi s. Ali herself shared the same background; born in Dhaka and raised in London, however, despite her background, critics and native community accused her of their stereotypical portrayal and inaccurate focus on poverty and remoteness of the area. A local doctor, named David Curtis, even labeled her as "wildly racist" (Curtis 27). They also believed that the novel's title was a deliberate choice to capitalize on Brick Lane's changing reputation, aligning with the renewed interests of the area. She also gets accused of accentuating the gentrification in that area by attracting a wider audience which sparked a controversy among local communities who deemed her work as a threat. "They associated Ali's text with outsiders' desire to convert the area's cultural cachet into lucrative property" (Brouillette 428). They felt exploited for monetary gains and misrepresented in the mainstream media. This debate untangled

the role of literature in shaping urban narratives and highlighted the broader issues of cultural representation and community identity.

Sarah Brouillette doesn't explicitly take her stance, rather centers her focus on the reception of the literature by the audience, along with the potential harm literature can do inadvertently. This places the scope of her work under the banner of reception studies, utilizing the methods of historical and contextual analysis, which makes her work discordant from the present study altogether. However, she deserves a eulogy for adopting a different vantage point altogether. Where researches have been scrutinizing the constructive role of literature and its use as an armament to combat gentrification, Brouillette takes a contrarian stance and spotlights the potential adversities that literature may bring in terms of gentrification. This makes her study unique and cardinal, for provision of new dimensions, and also for revealing the hidden flip side. However, as far as this study is concerned, Brouillette's work disparages itself from the present study in terms of its scope, argument and methodology. Hence, it becomes evident that both the studies scarcely share any similitude.

The primary texts this study aims to explore comprise a wide spectrum of thematic content. However, due to their contemporary nature, there is a conspicuous absence of scholarly inquiry concerning the phenomenon of gentrification as it relates to these primary texts. Furthermore, it is worth noting that these novels have received relatively limited research attention in any context. Overall, the broader theme of gentrification has received some attention, however, lots of facets and repercussions demand extensive scrutiny from different vantage points within the academic discourse of literature. Urban geography, urban sociology and overall urban development have drawn the attention of few scholars as well, however, they are not situated in the broader spectrum of gentrification, which makes them disparate and incongruous to present study. Consequently, this study aims to fill this discernible gap by conducting an extensive investigation of gentrification and its violation of inclusive urban essentials, like mandatory spatial structures as proposed by urban sociologists, its aftermaths on the overall economic equilibrium, and the rise of inauthentic culture; resulting in the commodification of local, authentic culture. Moreover, this study aims to conduct a rigorous examination of the process of

aestheticization, and its attempts to mask the adversities brought by the gentrifiers, as Lindner and Sandoval claim that aesthetics are the battleground where these urban spatial power struggles are played. This discernible gap within the existing body of academic knowledge presents an opportunity for investigation which this study intends to fulfil. Hence, the present study is totally in contrast to the prior research in this field.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1. Research Method

The present study aims to deploy qualitative and analytical research techniques for conducting an in-depth exploration of the selected texts. According to Creswell, qualitative research is an approach for the understanding and exploration of the meanings that people "ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell 22). By focusing on the perspectives and subjective experiences, qualitative research seeks to unearth the complexities of the themes and issues addressed in the texts, providing a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the narrative and its underlying messages.

The study will employ Catherine Belsey's textual analysis method for the scrutiny of these two texts *Halsey Street* (2018) and *The Talking Drum* (2020).

Catherine Belsey states: "Meaning is not at the disposal of the individual ... We learn to mean from outside, from a language A substantial element of education ... and it is this expanded vocabulary that permits us to think with greater clarity, to make finer distinctions." (Belsey 167). She challenges the autonomy of meanings, insisting that they are derived from the educational sources that provide the linguistic framework for determining the meaning. The present study will be reliant on the textual evidence for supporting the analysis. It involves systematic examination and interpretation of text for uncovering the meanings, structure, and cultural context. There are several key tenets of textual analysis as a research method:

1. Close reading: Textual analysis involves close reading of the text, which implies paying attention to the each and every minute detail such as word choice, sentence structuring, imagery, symbolism etc. Close reading assists the research for the identification of patterns and themes within the text.
2. Contextualization: Textual analysis demands the examination of text within its broader cultural, historical, and social context. This requires an understanding of the author's background, the time period in which the text was written, and the socio-cultural norms of that era.
3. Interpretation: Textual analysis involves interpreting the meaning through identification of themes, motifs, and symbols. This propels the researchers to

bring their own knowledge and understanding to the text, while also considering the perspectives of others.

4. Reflexivity: Textual analysis also demands reflexivity, which suggests that the researchers should be cautious about their own beliefs, biases, and values so they may not influence their interpretation of the text. It is obligatory for the researchers to be transparent about their own positionality. Along with this, the consideration of multiple perspectives is also mandatory.

Hence, the above tenets are going to be deployed for the textual analysis of the selected novels. For this, close reading of the texts is going to be done with the main emphasis on themes, motifs, characters, word choice, sentence structure, imagery and symbolism. Then, the novels are going to be examined within their broader cultural, historical, and social context. The content analysis will be conducted under the tenets of the developments of Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval on the subject of gentrification and its aestheticization. Whereas, Jane Jacobs serves as the second major theorist for this study. Following the “Winnow” method (Guest et al, 49), the textual analysis is going to expand upon specific textual elements directly or indirectly illuminating the pervasive themes of gentrification, and its impacts on the individuals and urban planning fundamentals. Different techniques used by the writer are going to be scrutinized to understand how the author constructs meanings and communicates themes.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

For the scrutiny of the primary texts, this research deploys Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval’s combined work on gentrification, and the aesthetics involved with it. Whereas, Jane Jacobs serves as the second theorist who provides the fundamentals that are cardinal for an inclusive and vibrant urban space. The theoretical underpinnings provide the fulcrum to scrutinize the ramifications of gentrification and its disruption of spatial structures that are vital for a vibrant and inclusive urban space. Moreover, the theoretical foundation provides assistance in uncovering the attempt to visually aestheticize the gentrified spaces to mask the tribulations brought by gentrification.

Gentrification is a multifaceted and complex social, economic, and urban phenomenon that involves the arrival of a wealthier, privileged class into a previously

lower-income neighbourhood which results in the alteration of neighbourhood's character, demographics, and overall development. This process leads to elevated property values, increased rents, and changes in the cultural and social fabric of the area. The term gentrification was initially introduced by a prominent urban sociologist Ruth Glass who is renowned for her significant work on cities, urban culture, and the impact of economic and social changes on urban spaces. She got acclamation after her distinctive work on gentrification, which she did not regard as mere physical change to the neighbourhoods, rather she visualizes it as social, cultural, and economic transformation. Glass elucidates how the process of gentrification can lead to the displacement of original residents and culture erasure, while catering to higher-income newcomers. She pinpoints how the working class of London suffers through the invasion of the middle-class and upper class and proclaims that: "Once this process of 'gentrification' starts in a district it goes on rapidly, until all or most of the original working-class occupiers are displaced" (Glass 4). According to her, this results in alteration of the whole social character of the district. For this, she holds global economic forces, consumer culture, and urban policies responsible for facilitating gentrification. She affirms that gentrification creates homogenized spaces that cater to affluent populations only, pushing the impoverished or those who cannot afford the rising costs as a result of gentrification to the margins. Consequently, the alterations that renewed urban spaces undergo only serve exclusive communities.

The major theorists for this research are Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval who are co-authors of *Aesthetics of Gentrification: Seductive Spaces and Exclusive Communities in the Neoliberal City* (2021). In their combined work, the intricate relationship between aesthetics, gentrification, and the urban landscape is scrutinized by delving into how the visual and sensory aspects of urban spaces contribute to the process of gentrification. They assert that visually appealing urban spaces labeled as "seductive spaces" by them, create alluring environments that attract affluent residents only. "We argue that aesthetics are integral to the global story of gentrification ... to produce the seductive conditions and instill the desires needed for creating exclusionary urban transformations predicated on displacing and disempowering vulnerable populations" (Lindner and Sandoval 14-15).

Lindner and Sandoval critically examine the role of aesthetics in reshaping neighbourhoods which dismantle inclusivity by displacing the existing residents, resulting in the formation of exclusive enclaves. They elucidate how the design and presentation of urban spaces rearrange the power dynamics between different social and economic groups. However, the detrimental effects brought by gentrification are always lurking behind. It offers a prospect of revitalized neighbourhoods adorned with trendy establishments to mesmerize the local residents as well as s. The architecture of the urban spaces is revamped, accompanied by the influx of new businesses, trendy boutiques, cafes, art galleries, and cultural venues emerge, offering a vibrant and diverse array of options. However, the adversities that come along with it are often concealed. By investigation of urban contexts combined with various case studies, they explain how aesthetics foster economic growth and consumption, while highlighting the exclusionary nature of gentrification and its impact on marginalized populations, resulting in exclusivity and social inequality. Lindner and Sandoval assert that these urban transformations are intimidating as they lead to the creation of neighbourhoods lacking uniqueness and vibrancy, along with absence of any established history. This, inturn, leads to “new forms of urban placelessness that impede belonging, reinforce exclusion, and further embed structural mechanisms of global inequality” (Lindner and Sandoval 22). In essence, *Aesthetics of Gentrification* (2021) offers a comprehensive exploration of how aesthetics intersect with urban development in reshaping of visual and social landscapes of cities, prompting readers to reflect on the complex dynamics of urban transformation. They scrutinize the intricate relationship between aesthetics, gentrification, and the urban landscape, delving into how the visual and sensory aspects of urban spaces contribute to the process of gentrification.

The process of gentrification brings along the promise of revitalized and improved infrastructure, architecture, opportunities of employment, and improvements in public investments. However, it merely caters to a certain class of people. Economic disparities arise, long standing community hubs vanish, alongwith sources of employment too, as the new revitalized urban ambiance demands workers accustomed to their trends only. A disdainful gaze is casted upon each and everything that finds any connection with the lower end of socioeconomic class. Hence, Lindner

and Sandoval demand strict monitoring in the design of urban policies, so that the distribution of wealth or opportunities are not disrupted and social cohesion remains intact, resulting in inclusivity. “Urban redevelopment actively produces spaces of desire and seduction that deliberately look and feel constructed in order to create gentrification effects that encourage mobility and exploit displacement of low-income populations.” (Lindner and Sandoval 15). They assert this notion vigorously and maintain their argument throughout their work that aesthetics serve as the battleground in contemporary societies, and power struggles are being played out through exclusion, as well as displacement.

Another cardinal issue Lindner and Sandoval raise is the diminishing of local culture. They affirm that local culture incorporates vitality and authenticity. However, the influx of wealthier residents sabotage the authenticity and vitality of local culture that has evolved organically over the years, replacing it with the one that alienates the residents. The new ambiance becomes unsettling for them, and the authenticity and vitality gets replaced with superficiality. The restlessness of the residents could not impede their eroding traditions, resulting in “cultural gentrification” (Lindner and Sandoval 17). Their social cohesion, cultural practices and identity are relentlessly squandered and their culture gets commodified - selective aspects of the local culture are accentuated while disregarding others, resulting in the loss of authentic charm.

The commercialization of local culture disrupts the social cohesion of original inhabitants, along with fracturing their whole cultural fabric. Their social networks, connections, traditions, even their games and recreational activities which are deeply rooted, are plundered mercilessly in the wake of this gentrification process. “Gentrification commodifies local culture, creates inauthentic local narratives, and leads inexorably to displacement and expulsion” (Lindner and Sandoval 21). Oral traditions, folklores, bedtime stories, which often serve as repositories of collective memory, are squandered in the tide of gentrification. These forces of gentrification snatch their cultural heritage, giving inauthentic and superficial ambiance to their space that is imposed on them externally. Moreover, the demographic shifts and displacement of the long-term residents make the local culture and traditions fragmented, which do not find any resonance with the new settlers anymore. To conclude, this process of gentrification poses a grave threat to the vitality and

authenticity of the culture. The richness, history, character, uniqueness, sense of belonging, everything gets relentlessly wiped out resulting in exclusivity and total disruption of social cohesion. Culture gets commodified, social bonds get eroded, and cultural practices endeavour to keep their relevance, however, all their jockeying ends in futility as the forces of gentrification are only there to serve the commercial purposes.

Gentrification is generally hailed as a symbol of urban revitalization, however, Lindner and Sandoval deem it as the sanitization of the society, and that too in negative terms - economic polarization exacerbates resulting in the marginalization of impoverished residents. They incorporated a chapter written by Brandi Thompson Summers in their book who asserts that the conversion of an urban space into a desirable and aesthetically pleasing space leads to its discovery by other people, and creates an urge for them “to take over, like in other neighbourhoods and cities” (Summers 130). Here, the process of gentrification is juxtaposed with colonialism in a metaphoric sense, and labeled as a new form of colonialism. The discovery of a certain space might become daunting for the local, less privileged classes, as the disruption of economic equilibrium results in skyrocketing rents and values, dismantling of local enterprises, and serious dent on the authentic and established local culture. Hence, this blemishing of culture results in their alienation and sense of loss. Moreover, rather than upgrading the impoverished and less affluent classes, efforts are made to wipe them out altogether as if it is the process of sanitization. “Gentrifiers attempt to tidy up urban space by removing its residents and completing and completing the task” (Summers 122). Here, the word “tidy” clearly depicts how the underprivileged classes are envisaged by the gentrifiers, as if they are blemish on the facade of their aesthetic vision.

Lindner and Sandoval claim that the tribulations brought by the process of gentrification are concealed under the mask of aestheticization. Its ramifications get camouflaged under the visual and sensory facets, as the urban space gets totally revitalized, adorned with trendy establishments. This revitalization yields mesmerizing effects for the affluent classes as well as the local residents. Hence, new businesses, trendy boutiques, cafes, art galleries emerge along with other cultural venues, creating a hoax of vibrant and dynamic urban space. “We see aesthetics as

increasingly being one of the battlegrounds where these urban spatial power struggles are played out through displacement, exclusion, and division” (Lindner and Sandoval 15). In this way, cultural and urban narratives are constructed, overshadowing the detrimental effects using aestheticization as the most vital armament. The erosion of culture, the disruption of social cohesion, the socioeconomic segregation, everything gets legitimized by using aestheticization as its tool. As a result, the issues of exclusion, displacement, alienation, cultural erasure, socioeconomic disparities, everything gets overshadowed by these forces used by the gentrifiers. “We explore how seduction has played an important role in attracting both people and capital to neighbourhoods labeled as “edgy”, “ethnically diverse”, “cool”, “hipster”” (Lindner and Sandoval 20).

To sum up, Lindner and Sandoval unearth the intricate relationship between aesthetics, gentrification, and the urban landscape. They carry out their scrutiny by delving into how the visual and sensory aspects of urban spaces contribute to the process of gentrification. They label visually appealing urban spaces as “seductive spaces” that create alluring environments that appear to be appealing, but essentially sabotage the fundamentals of an urban landscape mandatory for inclusivity, vibrancy, authenticity and richness.

This research also delves into the theories of Jane Jacobs as its second key theorist. Her work *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961) provides a critique of urban planning practices. She advocates vibrant communities characterized by mixed-use neighbourhoods, economic equilibrium, short blocks, and local community engagement. She also emphasizes the importance of sidewalks for a vibrant community as she believes in the intricate and dynamic patterns of pedestrian activity that occur on city sidewalks, and labels it as “sidewalk ballet” (Jacobs 50). For this, she emphasizes on mixed-neighbourhood use that embraces diversity and multiplicity of cultures. She asserts that a safe and dynamic neighbourhood is characterized by this constant movement and interaction among people on the streets, contrasting with the destructive impact of modernist planning. She also emphasizes the importance of organic growth which should encourage bottom-up planning along with the role of local communities in shaping their neighbourhoods. Her work remains influential in discussions on creating livable, participatory, and sustainable cities that

prioritize community well-being. Given her insightful critique of urban planning, her work provides a fulcrum to this research to determine the core elements of an inclusive and vibrant urban space, and for uncovering the pervasive effects of gentrification.

The most essential aspect highlighted by Jacobs that provides a support to this study is her concept of “cataclysmic money” (Jacobs 293). This term refers to externally driven large scale investment or funding that can have disruptive effects on urban spaces. She elucidates how a city overly reliant on such investments can lead to economic instability. Once the economic equilibrium is shattered, it leads to the displacement of existing businesses, communities, and economic structures. It may also promote speculative real estate development, which does not give any weightage to the wellbeing of the city, prioritizing short-term profits, ultimately resulting in the damage for the communities. This influx of external investment dismantles the organic and diverse economic activities that are essential for any urban space and pushes the local and small scale businesses to peripheries, sometimes resulting in total eradication.

“Cataclysmic money pours into an area in concentrated form, producing drastic changes. As an obverse of this behavior, cataclysmic money sends relatively few trickles into localities not treated to cataclysm” (Jacobs 293).

Jacobs explicates how the influx of external investments brings turbulence in the locality, resulting in the escalation of prices. This price hike in turn imperils the local and small scale enterprises, posing a looming threat. Hence, they are sidelined and left with the very little margin of growth, which places them at the risk of extinction. Upscale investments are prioritized, and anything associated with luxuriousness serves as a touchstone, leaving the small scale enterprises in jeopardy. For instance, a family owned restaurant or some boutique of small scale owned by some local owner can not withstand the cataclysm brought by the external affluent investors. Any entity with low monetary value finds it hard to stand any chance, as this process of gentrification is a battle of aesthetics as put by Lindner and Sandoval. The quality, richness, authenticity and endeavour becomes out of question. Hence, their jockey turns out to be futile in front of trendy and upscale boutiques or cafes. The local investors find it hard even to keep up with their rents, as the neighbourhood

undergoes swift price hikes in the wake of gentrification. This process does not send any trickle down effects, rather it leads to inorganic growth of the locality, resulting in polarization and exclusion. While stating her opinion about cataclysmic money, Jacobs notes that these kinds of investments “behave not like irrigation systems ... they behave like manifestations of malevolent climates beyond the control of man ... This is, of course, no constructive way to nurture cities” (Jacobs 293). Here, Jacobs makes it clear that the adversities brought by this process of gentrification outweigh any potential benefits. With this dismantling of local enterprises, the culture, the community ties, everything gets bulldozed, as the social and cultural fabric possesses intricate dynamics. A close-knit community gradually develops a sense of identity, along with cultural heritage. Once these local businesses are forced out, cultural authenticity and communal cohesion also gets sabotaged.

Precisely, her views on cataclysmic money highlight the importance of balanced and locally rooted economic development essential for keeping economic equilibrium intact. The focus of the cities should be on nurturing and expanding their existing economic strengths, rather than becoming overly reliant investment sources that are external and can lead to destabilizing effects. This perspective is also in harmony with her broader emphasis on the vitality of diverse, community-driven urban environments. As gentrification is a multifaceted social, economic, and urban phenomenon, her critique of economic factors provides a deep insight about the influx of externally driven large scale investments brought in as a result of gentrification.

Jane Jacobs also fosters the vitality of a sidewalk ballet which is essential for informal surveillance of an urban space. She emphasizes the importance of sidewalks for a vibrant community, as she believes in the dynamic patterns of pedestrian activities that occur on city sidewalks. For this, she emphasizes on mixed-neighbourhood use that embraces diversity and multiplicity of cultures, so that there is communal cohesion and a sense of shared identity. She proclaims that for the understanding of cities, there is a dire need to “deal outright with combinations or mixtures of uses, not separate uses, as the essential phenomenon” (Jacobs 144). This mixture of uses leads to the interaction of different communities yielding vibrant activities, which periodically results in strengthening of the informal surveillance of the urban space. She underscores the vitality of a sidewalk and labels the dynamic

activities taking place on those sidewalks as "sidewalk ballet" (Jacobs 50). The mixture of uses ensures continuous activities on the sidewalks throughout the day, resulting in the informal surveillance. She fosters the vitality of small enterprises and emphasizes the role of shopkeepers as natural proprietors of the city, who take responsibility of watching over their street. Acting as social hubs, these small enterprises encourage community interactions and a sense of belonging. Their presence adds to Jacobs' concept of "eyes on the street" (Jacobs 54), resulting in deterioration of crime. Jacobs reaffirms that a trust of a city is gained over a significant period of time through "many little public sidewalk contacts" (Jacobs 56). She labels the places where surveillance of the city is entirely left to police as "jungles" (Jacobs 32), as she believes in the informal surveillance being responsible for the safety of an urban space, rather than the provision of surveillance by the institutions.

Jacobs argues that urban areas should incorporate diverse land uses, including residential, commercial, and recreational spaces, to create dynamic and vibrant communities. Along with this, that area should cater to all classes including the affluent and impoverished ones. She was of the view that a variety of activities within the same area created a more vibrant and dynamic urban environment. When people live, work, shop, and engage in leisure activities in the same neighbourhood, it promotes social interaction and economic vitality. When different types of land uses coexist, it encourages local businesses to thrive. For instance, if someone possesses shops and hotels in a locality, it leads to the creation of job opportunities and support for the local businesses as the money spent by residents within their neighbourhood strengthens the local economy, making it more resilient. Jacobs argues that this economic diversity contributes to the overall health and stability of the community and urban area.

According to her, thriving cities are "natural generators of diversity and prolific incubators of new enterprises and ideas of all kinds" (Jacobs 145). For progression of an urban space, it is mandatory that they are "natural economic homes of immense numbers and ranges of small enterprises" (Jacobs 145). Here, she posits that the city that caters to the public from all classes and spatial dimensions, only that urban space truly attains the status of a metropolis as it provides an inclusive haven to the residents

and fosters diversity. Hence, only those urban spaces truly attain the status of a big city.

Precisely, she talks about the mixed-neighbourhood use and spatial structures that are vital for an urban space. Those spatial organizations should be designed in a way to cater all classes of residents. Moreover, there should be a blend of small and upscale, all kinds of businesses including both affluent and impoverished communities. This kind of spatial structuring promotes cultural richness along with suitability for economic growth too. “It is wrong to set one part of the population, segregated by income ... Separate but equal makes nothing but trouble in a society” (Jacobs 324). Now, what gentrification does is that it dismantles this structuring. Polarization increases more and more, resulting in the marginalization of underprivileged communities, and their exclusion from the mainstream. This results in the deterioration of cultural richness, cultural diversity and overall stability of that urban space. Moreover, the conditions for suitable economic growth are also disrupted. Hence, this tenet provided by Jane Jacobs is also viable for the present study.

Jane Jacobs also underscores the importance of community-centric cultural development. She lays emphasis on preservation and nurturing of local culture within urban neighbourhoods. She supports the idea of participatory urban planning, where residents and businesses actively engage in shaping their communities, fostering cultural growth. She supports the preservation of historic landmarks and local traditions, and also celebrates the cultural diversity that arises due to co-existence of the people within certain backgrounds. This perspective aligns with the concept of community-centric cultural development (Jacobs 187), where culture is seen as a dynamic force shaped by and in service of the local community, and planning decisions prioritize cultural richness and community participation. Moreover, even in terms of physicality, she fosters the notion of local community engagement in it. The urban developments that are evolved organically with the participation of the local residents are both vital and authentic. “Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them” (Jacobs 187). As they are the result of the local participation, they possess unique cultural richness and vibrancy. When community members are actively engaged, they bring

their collective knowledge, traditions, and values into the planning and design process. Additionally, when an urban space evolves organically, it creates sensory hotspots, emotional territories and memory-laden spaces for the residents. Sensory hotspots are those particular locations where sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, or smell, are particularly intense or noteworthy. Historic town squares, iconic old cafes filled with the aroma of brewed coffee, grand time-worn cathedrals which resonate with centuries of religious history, all these places evoke cherished memories, and some become emotional territories for the residents. Similarly, some parts serve as memory-laden spaces for the original residents due to their prolonged presence in the city and witnessing its evolutionary changes. However, local residents and communities are totally sidelined and pushed to the margins in the gentrified spaces. They do not have any say in the development of physical structures, nor do they contribute to cultural developments as they are completely sidelined and relegated to the outskirts. Hence, these views about community-centric developments by Jacobs are also vital for the scrutiny of gentrified spaces and their impacts on urban spaces and communities.

Gentrification often leads to commodification of culture. Only selective and desired facets of certain cultures are glorified to cater to the mainstream public.

Whereas, authenticity, vitality and richness is deliberately overlooked for monetary gains. It not only strips vibrancy, authenticity and spontaneity of a culture, but also reinforces the stereotypes. Only certain features and aspects are exalted, and that too in inauthentic ways, leading to superficiality. Now, the cultural fabric delineates complex dynamics. These disruptions bring in turbulent waves, leading to the erasure of history and plundering of the sense of belonging. The collective memory of the inhabitants is wiped out in this process of sanitization; as gentrifiers attempt to “tidy up” the urban spaces. The folklores, traditions, recreational activities, all these build up towards sublime feelings for the residents if evolved organically. They incorporate richness in them, and imbue exalted feelings in the residents, fostering the elevated sentiments. They identify themselves with these things. Even the importance of old landmarks are branded as cardinal by Jacobs. Moreover, the peculiar aspects of language and slangs of a certain society also reflect upon their lifestyles and shared history. Gentrifiers rob them from their rich cultural heritage and shared history,

plundering each and every unique facet in the process of commercialization. Jacobs claims that monopoly planning can lead to financial success and monetary gains, but it cannot be regarded as an “equivalent to city diversity. Nor can it substitute for inherent efficiency, in cities, of mingled age and inherently varied overhead” (Jacobs 192). Here, Jacobs showcases the significance of diversity, shared inheritance and organic evolution of an urban space. Whereas, attempts of gentrifiers are contrary to this. Local galleries, communication centers, local theaters, even local small scale businesses lead up to communal cohesion and enrich the cultural fabric. However, gentrifiers deliberately become oblivious to it for monetary gains. If there is a local song in which every local resident contributes, that song is going to incorporate unique features and notes that every different individual is going to bring in. However, gentrification replaces it with a single monotonous tune in an attempt to create homogeneity, losing the colorful mix of voices that was responsible for making it special. Moreover, gentrification often led to racial discrimination in the past, in addition to the social discrimination it is infamous for.

Jacobs enunciates that the organic evolution of an urban space is mandatory for a rich, vibrant and inclusive urban space. She severely castigates the cataclysmic money brought in during the process of gentrification that becomes responsible for the disruption of the economic equilibrium undermining the local enterprises. This results in their total exclusion from the space they have been residing in for a long time. Then, she underscores the importance of mixed-neighbourhood use, in which she fosters the spatial structuring that delineates diverse populations from each sector and segment of the society. This notion is mandatory for the creation of opportunities, specially for the impoverished classes. She also emphasizes the necessity of local involvement in the growth and evolution of culture, which is pivotal for the creation of richness, authenticity and vitality. Moreover, all these facets become interconnected in some way or other. Hence, all these proposals require scrupulous examination in order to create an urban space that is both vibrant and inclusive.

For the analysis of the primary texts, both Christoph Lindner and Gerard F. Sandoval’s work on gentrification and Jane Jacobs’ work on the fundamentals of urban planning are essential. Lindner and Sandoval provide insight about gentrification and the aesthetics involved with it, whereas, Jane Jacobs serves as a

second key theorist, who spotlights the fundamentals that are cardinal for an inclusive and vibrant urban space. The theoretical underpinnings provide the support to scrutinize the ramifications of gentrification, and its involvement in disruption of spatial structures that are vital for a vibrant and inclusive urban space. It also provides assistance in uncovering the attempt to visually aestheticize the gentrified spaces to mask the pervasive effects of gentrification.

CHAPTER 4

URBAN TRANSFORMATION AND ITS FALLOUT: PROBING HALSEY STREET AND THE TALKING DRUM AGAINST THE BACKDROP OF GENTRIFICATION

This chapter first reveals the background of the authors, Naima Coster and Lisa Braxton. Then it introduces their respective works, *Halsey Street* and *The Talking Drum*. After the introduction, these texts are probed under the theoretical underpinnings comprising exploration of gentrification, aestheticization, and urban planning fundamentals. The chapter first establishes a foundational understanding for the subsequent analysis of how gentrification violates the fundamentals of equitable urban planning leading to exclusivity, and then unearths the masking of these detrimental effects by using aestheticization as a tool. It delves into their detailed textual analysis for the revelation of how gentrification leads to exclusivity and marginalization.

4.1. Reimagining Communities: Gentrification in Naima Coster's *Halsey Street*

The inaugural text subjected to scrutiny in this study is Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* (2018). Hence, this inquiry would commence with the critical examination of this text. Naima Coster is a Dominican-American writer, acclaimed for her influential works exploring identity, family, and entanglements of human relationships. She became a celebrated figure after her publication of two novels, *Halsey Street* (2017) and *What's Mine and Yours* (2021), which brought her widespread recognition. Born in New York City, she receives much acknowledgment from the critics for her ability to craft rich and dynamic characters, whereas masses eulogize her for nuanced storytelling ability. Her works often expand upon the themes of gentrification, racial tensions, and the traumatic impacts on the communities and individuals.

Published in 2018, *Halsey Street* (2018) navigates through various themes like family, gentrification, identity, and loss. The plot is set in the rapidly changing neighbourhood of Bedford-Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, New York. The narrative centers around the protagonist named Penelope, and exhibits her tumultuous relationship with her mother, along with her father endeavouring to mitigate the disruptions brought by

the changing neighbourhood just to meet the exigencies of life. Hence, the novel showcases the impact of personal and societal change on their lives. Penelope aspires to be an artist, but after her unsuccessful stint at Pittsburgh, she returns back to her hometown to take care of her ailing father, Ralph, who runs a small record store named as Grand Records. Her homecoming is filled with mixed emotions, as she struggles to grapple with the memories of her past and the sheer changes the neighbourhood was going through. Simultaneously, the novel portrays the life of her mother, Mirella, who leaves her family and moves to the Dominican Republic. Penelope feels complete estrangement towards her mother, who endeavours to find her new sense of belonging and identity in the Dominican Republic.

The present study delves into this novel through the vantage point of gentrification and the tribulations brought by it, resulting in the exclusion of long-time residents, disrupting the notions of inclusivity. Coster vividly portrays the transformation of Bedford-Stuyvesant, foregrounding the rift between the long-time residents and the influx of affluent new settlers. This theme is cardinal to this novel as it reflects the broader issues of displacement, cultural erasure, as well as the disruption of authenticity and vibrancy of the neighbourhood. After the migration of the affluent class in the neighbourhood, the price hike becomes insane which leaves all the existing community perplexed, resulting in their alienation in their own homeland. The skyrocketing prices force them to migrate, pushing them to the peripheries. This results in their marginalization and exclusion, and in some cases, total eradication. Jane Jacobs, the theorist of this study, identifies one of the prime factors behind these ramifications as the influx of cataclysmic money; large scale external investments lacking community involvement. It sends the economy into a downward spiral, leading to disruption of the economic equilibrium (Jacobs 293). Coster showcases these upshots of gentrification primarily through the narratives of characters like Ralph, Penelope, and Lionel, along with other minor characters, serving as her mouthpieces.

The commodification of indigenous communities is a crucial aspect to consider when analyzing the project of gentrification in contemporary urban spaces. These communities have historically been marginalized, with their cultures commodified and their land exploited. This commodification extends beyond

economic exploitation; it involves transforming cultural expressions and traditions into consumable commodities designed to cater to the preferences of incoming, often wealthier, settlers. As gentrification takes hold, these commodified elements—such as art, music, and the social fabric—are repurposed to fit the desires and economic interests of outsiders. The conversion of local institutions, like the art school in Bed-Stuy, from spaces of authentic cultural expression into instruments of gentrification, illustrates this dynamic. With the displacement of the community, their cultural identity is diluted, and their capacity for self-representation and healing through art is undermined. Thus, gentrification goes beyond physical displacement; it represents a violent erasure of the community's history, autonomy, and cultural vitality. By understanding the commodification of indigenous communities, we can better grasp how gentrification acts as a continuation of historical exploitation, now disguised as urban revitalization.

Ralph, the father of Penelope, is the character of paramount importance, who serves as an emblem of resistance against the gentrifying neighbourhood. His music store named as Grand Records, is cardinal to the people and the space around him, which encapsulates their cultural heritage and stands tall against the gentrifying forces as the representative of their culture. His music store Grand Records serves as the focal point of this narrative, whereas Ralph turns out to be the guardian of the local culture, who jockeys to rescue his store despite the devastation of economic equilibrium caused by the cataclysmic money, and the disruptions in the spatial structuring of the neighbourhood. Along with him, Lionel's Sheckley's bar, and the school named as PS 23, which Penelope joins as an art teacher, are shown to be the victims of gentrification. Barely surviving, these hotspots struggle to maintain their entity in the wake of cataclysm. The price hike and inflation disrupt the existing spatial structures, making it an arduous task for them to combat the changes.

The new settlers raise their living standards and envision bright future prospects for themselves in the neighbourhood. "No matter how expensive gasoline or rice became, or how long electricity was out, in this country, their pounds and euros and dollars stretched far" (Coster 44). On the other hand, the original inhabitants seem to be lifeless, vanquished and alienated. On her return, Penelope perceives the neighbourhood as a place that had totally "died down" (Coster 24), as she hardly

notices any significant activity going on. For a vibrant and inclusive neighbourhood, Jacobs proposes the notion of mixed-neighbourhood use in which diverse communities share a common space (Jacobs 144). However, gentrifiers put themselves in oblivion to this idea, squandering the urban space by disrupting the underlying spatial structuring. Only the affluent class finds their way to the epicenters of the urban space, whereas the impoverished ones tend to shy away if they somehow manage the occupation of their space. So, the first interaction Penelope experiences with her old neighbourhood totally dejects her, as she experiences the lifelessness and vanquishment among her old neighbours. She barely notices any people outside, and the few “who were outside were on their stoops, watching the sun go down” (Coster 24). The very first interaction of Penelope with her neighbourhood becomes dispiriting, and the way she describes the sun going down is emblematic of the collapse of her beloved neighbourhood. The original residents of the neighbourhood are portrayed as lifeless creatures, just feebly witnessing their devastation without impeding or even trying to impede. This very first interaction sets the tone of the narrative, envisaging the devastation of the neighbourhood and helplessness of the original inhabitants in the whole scenario. Their beloved neighbourhood, like the setting sun, is on the verge of vanishing.

For masking the adversities brought by gentrification, aestheticization becomes an armament for the gentrifying forces. The attempt to revitalize the neighbourhood, adorned with trendy establishments, conceals the devastation of this revitalization and a delusional facade of advancement and progression gets foregrounded. Consequently, it causes upheaval in the society, and this turmoil vanishes the history, authenticity and uniqueness of the culture, resulting in alienation and cultural erasure. However, trendy establishments like cafes, bodegas, bars, upscale boutiques, revamped infrastructure, and the delusion of a promising future and bright prospects create a hoax for concealing this turmoil. Lindner and Sandoval label these spaces as “spaces of desire and seduction” (Lindner and Sandoval 15). These seductive spaces camouflage the atrocities committed in the neighbourhood. The exclusion of the low-income populations and in some cases, their total eradication gets overlooked.

In Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* (2018), sensory hotspots turn out to be the most crucial elements that play a pivotal role in any urban space. Sensory hotspots refer to any location within an urban environment that provides unique and intense sensory experiences. They may engage one or more senses of a visitor, creating a memorable and engaging experience for them. These hotspots can stimulate multiple senses such as sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. In the context of this novel, there are three sensory hotspots that play a crucial role in shaping the culture of their urban space and stand tall against the gentrifying forces. Ralph's music store named as Grand Records,

Lionel's bar named Sheckley's bar, and PS 23 art school, all these spaces provided multiple sensory experiences to the residents, serving as guardians of their history and culture. However, all these hotspots are exhibited as vulnerable, dwindling and diminishing in the wake of gentrification.

Ralph, father of Penelope, owns Grand Records, one of the premier establishments of Bed-Stuy. A music store is a sensory hotspot that offers a unique blend of sensory experiences for the visitors. The variety of music in the store provides dynamic auditory experiences. The eye-catching displays and shelves, along with the vibrant records and covers are visually appealing, whereas the interactions with the instruments and vinyl records offer unique tactile experiences for the visitors. Above all, the musical store is both the product of a culture, as well as the guardian of the culture. David Howes inscribed in *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*

(2005): "The human sensorium, however, never exists in a natural state. Humans are social beings, and just as human nature itself is a product of a culture, so is the human sensorium" (Howes 3). This concept of sensorium implies that the whole system of sensory perception delineating all the human senses never exists in a natural state, rather it is a product of cultural and societal contexts. Individuals learn to interact with the sensory information according to their cultural norms and values. In a way, sensory experiences are shared and communicated in a social setting. Therefore, Howes asserts that while human sensory abilities are innate, their development and refinement are highly dependent on the cultural and environmental factors. So, sensory perceptions are adaptive and can alter under the influence of cultural and

societal norms. That is the fundamental reason for the disparities in the tastes and perceptions of different cultures; one culture may acknowledge a certain thing, whereas the other turns a blind eye to it.

Coster vividly exhibits Ralph's Grand Record as the most crucial sensory hotspot of the neighbourhood, and the flagbearer of the local culture. Ralph's endeavour to resist the aftermaths of gentrification, and his struggle to keep the cultural values intact through his music despite the adverse circumstances, makes him and his music store the custodian of the local culture. His venture to rescue his store and culture becomes a recurring motif of Naima Coster's text, and also becomes a symbol of resistance. As affirmed by Howes, sensory perceptions are products of cultural and societal norms. Hence, the music produced by Ralph reflects his neighbourhood, authenticity, and history. Jacobs also advocates the participation of the local communities in shaping culture. She deems the culture nurtured by the involvement of local communities as rich and authentic, whereas the culture imposed externally as superficial, lacking uniqueness (Jacobs 187). Ralph emerges as an incarnate of this spirit, and his struggle to safeguard his culture through his music store turns out to be a recurring motif of this text.

As gentrification hits local businesses, the disruption in the economic equilibrium of Bed-Stuy forces the closure of Ralph's music store, Grand Records. This closure sparks a ripple effect resulting in personal turmoil and financial strain. Additionally, the cultural fabric and social cohesion gets jeopardized. This whole scenario makes Ralph dejected and apprehensive, who starts behaving like a lifeless creature, only hoping against hope to miraculously reopen the store. However, his most significant concern that is traced all over the text is his anxiety about cultural decline, much more than his personal turmoil and financial woes. Lindner and Sandoval reflect upon this idea how gentrification commodifies local culture, creates inauthentic local narratives, and leads to suspension of the established culture. In some cases, it even leads to the obliteration of local communities (Lindner and Sandoval 21). Ralph even loses his family in order to safeguard his store. His wife had a tumultuous relationship with him, and eventually leaves him accusing of overindulgence in his store, but he always maintains his stance that it is essential for his neighbourhood. So, he emerges as a guardian of the culture, authenticity, and

richness of his neighbourhood. Ralph's friend, Lionel, assures Ralph's wife Mirella about the significance of Ralph's work and his store for the neighbourhood. "That's all we've got, you know - our music. Most people in this neighbourhood don't have a single thing of their own ... Grand Records has done this for the neighbourhood ... Our music reminds us we are all connected" (Coster 98). Here, Lionel is seen underscoring the necessity of Ralph's store for the neighbourhood. As mentioned by Howes, the sensory perceptions are always a product of the culture. Here, Ralph's store produces music, which is the direct manifestation of their cultural heritage. The music that is embedded in their genetic makeup. Lionel highlights the pride of ownership, revealing the dignity that comes with owning something. He even compares his bar with Ralph's store, and confesses that Ralph's work deserves praise of high merit compared to him. However, his effort goes in vain as Mirella seems to be unimpressed by his sermon.

Jacobs also fosters the significance of community-centric cultural development. The involvement of local communities in the development of culture produces much more authentic, rich and vibrant culture, than the culture forcefully imposed externally. "Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody" (Jacobs 238). Externally imposed cultures prioritize superficiality over depth, focusing on surface level appearances, often leading to commodification of culture. The way Lionel emphasizes the essentiality of Ralph's store, showcases the significance of an organic growth of the culture. His store serves as a sensory hotspot for the neighbourhood over the years and holds strong associations with the public. The music produced in his store caters to the taste of the local residents, rather than superficial, commodified versions. The sensorium of the residents evolved periodically and organically. Their taste resonated with what Ralph offered them. "They can't believe how much good music was made here in Brooklyn, here, by their own people" (Coster 98). On the other hand, the gentrifying forces dismantle these notions, creating a superficial, commodified, and inauthentic environment, marginalizing the flag bearers of authentic local culture. Lindner and Sandoval label it as "cultural gentrification" (Lindner and Sandoval 17). Cultural productions shine when they evolve organically, manifesting lifestyles, tastes, values and ideologies. However, if imposed externally, they lack luster and are

replaced with commodified, superficial versions. The neighbourhood of Bed-Stuy does not need the modern, trendy performers, rather they are content with the offerings Ralph has for them which resonate with their preferences.

Throughout the narrative, Ralph highlights the significance of his store for communal cohesion and integration of the society. Even the protagonist, Penelope, acknowledges her father's endeavour to keep people integrated. When Mirella curses him over his overindulgence in his store, even Ralph becomes skeptical about his efforts. Nevertheless, Penelope acknowledges his struggle all over the years and assures him that the store had been greatly impactful for the neighbourhood as "It brought people together" (Coster 112). This way, she notifies him how a music store serves as a vibrant hub for the integration of communities, uniting the residents through their shared love of music. When people assemble in an environment familiar to them and resonating with their preferences, vibrant activities take place, fostering societal cohesion. The bonding among the visitors strengthens in an environment familiar and appealing for them; their sense of camaraderie gets nurtured. They further evolve their preferences, mannerism, habits, and sensory perceptions organically and collectively, nurturing a rich, authentic and dynamic environment. Moreover, a music store provides a platform for local musicians to display their skills, making it an inclusive space, as Lionel pointed out that people abstained from believing that how much good music was produced in Brooklyn by their own people. "They walk into Ralph's store and they see that black people can do things. They can create" (Coster 98). It exhibits how their own production accentuates the confidence of local inhabitants, evoking exalted, sublime feelings, and a sense of contentment. The fact that they produced music of top-notch quality, boosted their self-esteem, which induces the sense of pride and connectivity with the community.

As underscored by Jacobs, the most dreadful aspect of gentrification is the disruption of economic equilibrium by bringing in the cataclysmic money. This results in marginalization of the local communities, unable to withstand the price hike. "Cataclysmic money sends relatively few trickles into localities not treated to cataclysm" (Jacobs 293). She explains how large-scale investments create drastic changes in targeted areas, totally becoming oblivious to local, small-scale businesses. She further points out how this cataclysmic money results in total eradication of small

enterprises, labelling it as “destructive to every other form of city order” (Jacobs 303). Ralph’s ill-fated store also embraces the same destiny. “It’s a shame that making room for white folks mean the rest of us have to go” (Coster 71). Rather than organic growth with the involvement of local enterprises, it results in drastic changes, bringing in calamities for the small-scale enterprises. Ralph is crestfallen over this fact that the adjustment of white community comes at the cost of their exclusion from the neighbourhood nurtured by them over the years. They are the original inhabitants, totally sidelined in the new scheme of the things due to economic disparities. He is unable to concede to the fact that once a hero, a leading figure of the society, is now ostracized from his own neighbourhood, forced to seclusion, and even unable to pay his rent. “The rent for the store had been increasing steadily for the past seventeen years” (Coster 267). It was still manageable for Ralph until some migrant new settler offered the double amount of what Ralph paid to the landlord. Along with him, a number of other local enterprises get priced out due to the upshots of gentrification, as the economic equilibrium of the neighbourhood gets plundered, without any alternate adjustments for the local community. This marginalization on the basis of economic disparities becomes problematic, dismantling the spatial structuring mandatory for inclusivity and vibrancy of an urban space (Jacobs 324).

Apart from cultural authenticity and social cohesion, the decline of Grand Records epitomizes how the gentrifying forces smash the lives of individuals on a personal level. Ralph, once a pillar of his community, now lived a life in seclusion, merely waiting for the arrival of his death in lonely despair. His wife Mirella abandons all her aspirations in the wake of a chaotic relationship with him. He was unable to even meet the exigencies of life due to the upheaval brought in the neighbourhood by the influx of the new affluent, privileged, and parochial class. This situation leads to his strained relationship with Mirella, who eventually abandons him, leaving Penelope, her child, vulnerable. Penelope felt neglected, as Ralph was preoccupied trying to preserve his shop amidst the encroaching changes brought by gentrification. Ralph eventually curses himself, unable to comprehend the reason behind this turmoil and holds himself accountable: “I messed it all up over that goddamned store” (Coster 112).

Ralph's store gets turned into a shop named Sprout. When Penelope visits her father's old store now converted into Sprout, she deciphers how the initials of their names were covered with green paint and questions: "Had the green paint been enough to cover them?" (Coster 26). In a way, she takes a jibe at the whole process of gentrification with these remarks, where a delusional, aesthetic facade is created to conceal the realities. However, it comes at a huge cost, as it devastates the lives of longterm residents. Penelope also wanted to feel that wall where those initials were carved, but rain impedes her. She wanted to feel it under her fingers if those etchings still survived or not (Coster 26). This yearning to even touch that wall epitomizes that store was much more than a source of income for her; it encapsulated her spirit. It embodies her identity, her history, and her memories, as it has played a vital role in shaping her life, along with her family. It stands as a testament of their shared experiences, which could not be snatched from them merely with a green paint over the initials.

Ralph, once a central figure of the community, lived a miserable life now. When

Penelope joins PS 23, the principal, Mrs. Pine recognizes her solely as Ralph's daughter. The Harpers, newcomers to the neighbourhood, acknowledged Ralph and the significance of Grand Records for the neighbourhood, although they migrated after the closure of the store. Nevertheless, now Ralph was a reclusive alcoholic, who seldom goes out, awaiting his death. The fact that he goes from April to August without leaving the house makes Penelope furious (Coster 75). This showcases the pervasive effects of gentrification on the personal lives of individuals. An individual sacrificing all his for his store and neighbourhood, suffers such an ill-fated decline at the hands of gentrifying forces. Once he used to shape and nurture the auditory perceptions and preferences of the society, was now at the mercy of people totally foreign to his neighbourhood.

"Church ladies always came for Gospel albums, but the top sellers were always hiphop" (Coster 94). They always probed Ralph about his opinions and preferences, and he always responded to their inquiries with nonchalant ease, as if everything was obvious to him (Coster 95). This elucidates his status as a revered figure amongst all segments of the society, with people seeking him out to benefit from his expertise. Linder and Sandoval assert that the gentrifiers create environments lacking

uniqueness, and erode the sense of belonging of the residents, accentuating the inequality and exclusion (Lindner and Sandoval 22). This exclusion and inequality eventually leads to a point where individuals lose their grip on life. Characters like Ralph are paragons of a central figure transformed into a solitary, despondent individual.

Ralph sacrifices his entire life for his store. Despite being helpless, he was adamant that the neighbourhood required it. Ultimately, he loses his wife, who gets infuriated over his selflessness. She believes that Ralph was always “waxing about the state of his neighbourhood instead of his own” (Coster 163). Even after the years when Penelope meets her, she remarks that only records are able to make him happy, and not the family. In a way, “The end of Grand Records had been the end of Ralph Grand” (Coster 71). Subsequently, he was unable to make up for the losses. He loses his health, his family, his self-esteem, everything, just to withstand the pressures of the encroaching changes taking place, only for the sake of the neighbourhood. The decline of his store symbolizes the deterioration of his neighbourhood, merely falling prey to the gentrifying forces. His store endured the “boom of the internet, all the closing of the corporate CD stores” (Coster 204), and stayed open during the worst of the times. He was unable to decipher the causes behind the slump now, and returned to home each day, dejected and “defeated” (Coster 205). The store that resisted the boom of the internet, even when most of the CD stores perished, ultimately succumbs to the tribulations brought in by gentrification.

Ralph’s store served as a sensory hotspot for Bed-Stuy that holds a paramount significance in shaping the culture. It not only nourished and nurtured the local culture, but also fostered communal integration and social cohesion. Nevertheless, its decline due to the adversities of gentrification creates an indelible scar on the local community. These kinds of hotspots are invaluable for the communities, shaping their sensory perceptions, and creating an alluring and inclusive environment in any urban space. Apart from fostering the local culture, these hotspots hold strong ties with the individuals, and specially the individuals owning them. The attempt of gentrifiers to plunder these hotspots is deliberate, as they attempt to create a commodified, superficial space, only beneficial for their monetary gains, excluding the local communities altogether. Apart from blemishing the culture, the decline of these

hotspots results in demolishing the lives of the individuals financially dependent on them. Hence, this revitalization of the urban space comes at a huge cost of plundering the lives of long-established residents.

Lionel's Sheckley's bar also served as an influential sensory hotspot in Bedford Stuyvesant. A bar caters to the diverse tastes and preferences of its patrons, and as affirmed by Howes, it also plays a pivotal role in shaping their preferences and tastes. Predominantly a gustatory and olfactory hotspot, the aroma of food, and the savory taste particularly associated with the beverages and snacks of that bar, occupy a unique place in people's hearts. They associate with those tastes and smells as they are products of their culture. Throughout the novel, characters are seen to disparage the tastes of new cafes and restaurants, as their taste seemed artificial and weird to them. "Just as meanings are shared, so are our sensory experiences" (Howes 4). Howes proposes that sensory experiences are shared and nurtured collectively, in a particular environment and culture. Thus, the residents of Bed-Stuy abhorred the new establishments due to their state of being anomalous to their preferences. Additionally, Sheckley's bar is seen to play vibrant and diverse music all the time, serving as an auditory hotspot also.

Unfortunately, like other hotspots, Sheckley's bar also became a victim of the gentrification wave.

Ralph, Mirella and Penelope are seen to commemorate all their special occasions at Sheckley's bar. The bar plays a role as a social hub and a vibrant center of community life. It provided people with the opportunity to socialize and forge connections. The taste of its beverages and snacks, the aroma of food, the music, everything resonated with the masses. All the major characters felt a sense of belonging with that bar. The visual representation of drinks, furniture, and the particular arrangement of things in the bar created unique tactile experiences for the masses, which became part of their culture and seemed familiar to them. These bars, like Grand Records, also serve as a central point for communal cohesion and societal integration, providing a familiar and comfortable environment to the masses for social interactions and vibrant activities. Moreover, these bars offer a private space to the individuals, providing them a safe haven for introspection and contemplation.

The gentrifiers disregarded this serviceability, converting Sheckley's bar into a commercialized, commodified place, totally alien for the masses, masking it under the banner of revitalization. This distortion of the culture is deemed as cultural gentrification by Lindner and Sandoval, who assert that these distortions are echoes of colonialism. The product is a commodified version of the local culture, stereotyping the masses, rather than their authentic representation. "Gentrification commodifies local culture, creates inauthentic local narratives ..." (Lindner and Sandoval 21). This commodification makes Ralph more and more despondent, who is engrossed in nostalgic recollections of the past all the time. Lionel, the owner of the bar, fails to guard his bar, and eventually dies. Penelope revisits the new version of the bar, but only to get dispirited. The new owner tries to keep the few elements of that bar intact, resulting in commodification rather than authentic representation. As previously discussed in the literature review section, James Peacock labels these remnants as ghosts of the past. "The same shabby sign hung over the door ... the old radiators hissing heat. The red vinyl booths were still there" (Coster 108). Peacock notifies that the remnants and memories, or ghosts of the past as he labels them, are deliberately kept by the gentrifiers for exploiting the local culture for monetary gains (Peacock 136). One prime example of this commodification surfaces when Jon and Penelope feel infuriated with particular music being played over and over again. There were strict commands by the new owner for playing that music only, exhibiting his narrow, superficial understanding of the neighbourhood. Jon registers his complaint about not having any control over the stereo system, but the new owner of Sheckley's forces him to "play only Motown on Sunday afternoons" (Coster 226). Although the long-term residents like Penelope and Jon abhorred that music, the owner persisted in his parochial views and kept playing the same record over and over again, driven by his desire of accumulating increasingly greater financial gains. This shows he viewed the neighbourhood with a particular lens that obstructed his vision of the authentic neighbourhood. He failed to decipher the real preferences of the masses, rather followed his own, flawed perceptions.

The original Sheckley's bar also played a vital role in Ralph's life, before being replaced by the modernized version, leaving behind fond memories. These small enterprises are mandatory for the diversity and richness of an urban space. The

exclusion of these small enterprises plunder the spatial structuring mandatory for a dynamic space. Jacobs labels it as mixed-neighbourhood use, and advocates the spatial structuring that accommodates all the classes together, resulting in production of vibrant activities (Jacobs 324). After the marriage, the first thing Ralph does is carry out his celebration at Sheckley's, underscoring its significance in their lives. The familiar ambiance of Sheckley's provided them a sense of belonging, comfort, and perfectly resonated with their tastes. Consequently, they celebrated their special occasions at Sheckley's thereafter, and specially their wedding anniversary, each and every year (Coster 87). This mirrors the deeper meaning the bar encapsulates for them. It was not merely a physical space for them anymore, rather an emotional territory, a memory-laden space. It served as a cultural hub for the society, where happiness and connections thrived. For Ralph and his family, it was an emotional refuge. Their joy and shared experiences were intertwined at Sheckley's, forming an integral part of their lives' fabric. This illustrates how certain spaces transcend physical presence, becoming emblems of personal and collective memories. Even after the revamped version of the bar, Penelope visited it when in low spirits. She perceived it as an emotional haven. "God I needed that ... his stories, the mod music, the familiar interior of Sheckley's. I've needed to get away" (Coster 168). This asserts that the bar was beyond a mere physical space for the community, rather an emotional territory, a memory-laden space, a refuge.

It gives Penelope strength when she feels dispirited.

The Grand family's tastes and preferences resonated with the offerings at Sheckley's. After the demise of Lionel, and revamping of Sheckley's, they struggled to find any other match for their taste buds. Hardly any other place catered to their preferences. Ralph, who used to order "Dominican cake with guava fillings" (Coster 103) at Sheckley's, now sits motionless in new cafes, struggling to develop any association with the new establishments. When Penelope takes him to a new restaurant to cheer him up, he is unable to feel any acquaintance with the ambiance. "Is this supposed to be a soul food place? ... The place didn't have flowers on the table. You think they're charging us for the flowers here?" (Coster 68). His inquiry visibly surfaces from the reality that the revamped places lack the spirit, authenticity, and soul, rather they act as money generators for the affluent class, who perceive the

locality as a milking cow. When they were offered a free dessert at the end, Ralph defines its taste as “gooey and false and delicious” (Coster 74). The use of this word “false” by Ralph illustrates how much the local community disparaged the migrants and everything associated with them. Even their desserts seemed uncanny to the local inhabitants. Similar incident occurs when Penelope presents a chocolate to the neighbourhood kid, Natalie, as she finds it weird, and fails to develop any connection with it by simply saying, “It tastes funny” (Coster 55). This shows her lack of connectivity with those kinds of chocolates as she was not accustomed to them in her neighbourhood. Similarly,

Ralph’s sensory perceptions aligned with his own neighbourhood. Ralph couldn’t digest the fact that his neighbourhood went through so drastic changes, and the new, revitalized neighbourhood lacked the soul. As the sensory perceptions are nourished through shared experiences, Ralph’s preferences and tastes align with his own neighbourhood, and not with the migrants. If the neighbourhood is to be evolved, it needs to be evolved from within, as Jacobs enunciates that dynamic and vibrant urban spaces “contain seeds of their own regeneration” (Jacobs 448). Anything imposed externally cannot resonate with the masses, although gentrifiers attempt to build their association with the renewed neighbourhood. That is why Ralph abhors the dessert presented to him, as his sensory perceptions are a product of his own culture, which makes it clear that sensorium is a product of the shared experiences and the culture in which individuals are brought up, validating the proposal of Howes about preferences and sensory perceptions. Maria Sulimma also inscribed this in her essay about the discontentment of the locals against the preferences of the gentrifiers. She places it in the context of microscripts being used as a technique, in which mundane daily routine activities like buying coffee or going to a particular cafe morphs these moments into powerful symbols of broader social changes, as the disapproval of the preferences imposed externally serves as a symbol of retaliation. For this, short passages, identified as microscripts by Sulimma, are deliberately deployed by the writers, serving as a tool against the gentrifiers.

All the history, authenticity, and spirit associated with the Sheckley's is attempted to be replaced merely with aestheticization by the gentrifiers. Penelope notices the redesigned menu with "single glossy sheet, a list of cocktails on one side, standard bar fare on other" (Coster 165). Menu also delineated asterisked notes,

delineating information about the ingredients and the spirits, and from where they had been sourced. The bar visibly provided much more offerings, with fancy cocktails and sophisticated detail of ingredients, with ambiance also rejuvenated. Yet, the locality fails to develop any association or connection with it, as proclaimed by Ralph: "They think neighbourhood is only about what you can buy - fancy coffee, flowers on the table ... It's all just stuff to them ... A neighbourhood means much more than that. It's about the people" (Coster 73). He explicitly clarifies the ingredients of a dynamic and inclusive neighbourhood, which grows organically with the local community as a major contributor and not the external forces. As Jacobs reaffirms that urban spaces are inclusive only when they are "created by everybody" (Jacobs 238). Otherwise, the claims of inclusivity would always remain problematic. The space developed by external forces never achieves richness and always results in the alienation of local communities in their own land.

The third sensory hotspot that undergoes the detrimental effects of the wave of gentrification is an art school, PS 23, which Penelope joins as an art teacher. An art school serves as a sensory hotspot as it infuses the environment with energy. It provides a platform to the people for manifesting their artistic expressions. The visual interaction with different art forms creates unique visual experiences. The auditory landscape is enriched by music recitals and theatrical performances, whereas the smells of paint, clay, and wood caters to the olfactory perceptions. The process of creating artistic expressions requires physical interaction of artists with different materials, which creates a unique tactile experience for them. Thus, an art school gratifies the sensory perceptions of the neighbourhood, as Howes fosters that sensory experiences are shared, and emanate out of cultural practices (Howes 4). In return, these sensory experiences then reciprocate by playing their part in further nourishment of the culture. This process periodically results in the development of rich, authentic and vibrant culture, emanating out of the preferences of the masses rather than external imposition.

The art school, PS 23, suffers a substantial threat in the face of gentrification's transformative effects. Although it withstands its ground unlike Grand Records and Sheckley's, its endurance practically becomes futile for the neighbourhood, as the neighbourhood students were already forced out of the neighbourhood. The ones

continued, appeared to be devoid of life, with minimal participation in school activities. The students of affluent, migrant families became the driving force of the school. This scenario poses a grave threat for the nourishment of local culture, as an art school plays a significant role in cultural development of an area. Moreover, it provides an encouraging environment to the students for creating artistic expressions, and thus shaping their own personalities through it. The seizure of art school from the original inhabitants implies that they stand marginalized in their own backyard.

Upon her return, Penelope joins PS 23 as an art teacher, when she discerns that migration of the white class has totally crumbled the art school, as far as locals were concerned. Most of the teaching faculty was now white, not belonging to that neighbourhood originally, along with the major chunk of students also foreign to that land. Majority of the local community already migrated, unable to combat the pricehike and inflation after the major alterations to the neighbourhood. This results in the violation of spatial structuring deemed as essential for an inclusive urban space by Jame Jacobs. Segregation on the basis of economic disparity poses a grave threat for the inclusivity of an urban space (Jacobs 324). Even if the school wasn't predominantly white, it was flooded with new migrants who arrived in major chunks after the gentrification. They came from privileged backgrounds, talking about their lavish nightly dinners and exciting summer vacations on shores. Penelope envied them as

“they'd such wide lives” (Coster 51). Penelope clearly discerns the disparity amongst the long-term residents and the migrants, branding them as already “defeated, hardened, and long out of art school” (Coster 51). After the migration of a major portion of the population, those left behind could not feed their children properly. Even after arriving at school, they kept battling their cravings for food rather than focusing on work. Although Penelope tries to provide some assistance to the few students on a personal level like Natalie, it turns out to be overwhelming for her. As a result, the art school which could have been a vital outlet and a vibrant hotspot for the local children to express their creativity and artistic expressions, suffers through a severe decline along with other neighbourhood hotspots that were supposed to be the major contributors to the local culture.

As Regina Marie Mills notes in her study discussed in the literature review section, the art for Penelope serves as an armament in the narrative. She affirms how art, quietness, and secrecy are feminized forms of expression and belonging, and the symbol of resilience against the stronger forces of the society. She notifies how rather than deploying some violent means of resistance, art and quietude are shown as weapons for Penelope, which assists her in reconnection and healing. Art creates a space of "interiority" for Penelope, which helps her in introspection, and in provision of moments of quiet for her, fostering her healing and regrowth (Mills 404). This visualizes the power of art for regrowth, healing, introspection, and a form of resilience. Therefore, the exclusion of the local inhabitants from the art school implies the systemic erosion of all these resources. It shows all these opportunities being stripped away from the local community. It is not just loss of a physical institution for the neighbourhood, rather it is a violent suppression of the local community's ability to introspect, heal, regrow, and reclaim their power through their art and soft power, silencing their voices and erasing their cultural identity.

Mrs. Pine, the principal, tries to placate Penelope by assuring her the benefits of this integration amongst different communities, however, Penelope remains skeptical, thinking about the students already displaced and forced to leave the school (Coster 29). For a vibrant and inclusive space, the exclusion of any class poses a grave threat and violates the mandatory spatial structuring catering to all segments of the society. Jacobs advocates the spatial structuring that accommodates the disparate classes of the society, and perceives it mandatory for the production of dynamic, rich and inclusive urban space (Jacobs 324). Yet, Bed-Stuy constantly kept vacating the original residents due to the overbearing price-hike, resulting in the disruption of spatial structuring mandatory for an inclusive urban space. This systematic exclusion of the local inhabitants also results in the "cultural gentrification" (Lindner and Sandoval 17), displacing the long-term residents to dilute their cultural characteristics. The art school, once a haven for the local dwellers to showcase their artistic expressions, is now alien to them. The place where art should have been emanating from the sensory experiences of the local community and their application, now caters to the foreigners. Now, the few original inhabitants left are forced to learn and create art as per the preferences of the foreign migrants, and those preferences cannot

resonate with the sensorium of the masses, hence resulting in deterioration of the local culture, yielding inauthenticity.

Gentrification plunders the authentic character and social fabric of the city and conceals it through aestheticization, prioritizing cosmetic improvements over community needs. Rather than organic evolution, they attempt to sanitize the neighbourhood through excluding the original inhabitants. The upscale boutiques, cafes, revamped infrastructure and trendy establishments create an aesthetically pleasing space, diverting the attention from the detrimental effects. "We see aesthetics as increasingly being one of the battlegrounds where these urban spatial power struggles are played out through displacement, exclusion, and division" (Lindner and Sandoval 15). Lindner and Sandoval regard aesthetics as the battlefield. They argue that the sensory appeal and aesthetics of urban spaces are the new battlegrounds in order to acquire control over the city. It is no longer a matter of taste, rather a powerful tool in urban power dynamics. This process of aestheticization is manipulated to facilitate displacement, exclusion, and division. Nonetheless, the disruption in spatial structures, economic equilibrium, and the severe damage of cultural and social fabric gets overlooked. Rowland Atkinson and Gary Bridge regard this gentrification as a "form of new urban colonialism" (Atkinson and Bridge 2). It is identical to colonialism in terms of displacement, cultural erasure, and economic exploitation of the local populations. Gentrifiers impose their own values, cultures and systems, which mirrors the colonial practices, asserting their hegemony over the local community.

The new settlers of Bed-Stuy were ignorant towards the neighbourhood and the local community. Bed-Stuy was hardly recognizable to the locals, and "Almost everyone was gone" (Coster 18). Marcus, an epitome of ignorant migrants, casted a disdainful gaze upon them, leading to Penelope's confrontation with him as she assured him that people in the neighbourhood had their own lives and "no one was thinking about him, not really" (Coster 61). This envisages their parochial attitude towards the neighbourhood and its people. Additionally, they posed like a Messiah in front of the people, as if they were rescuers of the neighbourhood from decay. Marty, a friend of Marcus, tries to assure Penelope that they are the saviors of Bed-Stuy, and their romantic attachments with the old neighbourhood are superfluous. "Tell me you

don't like good coffee. Tell me you didn't like that beer. And why not? Why not enjoy good things" (Coster 174). This emblemizes the myopic attitude of the gentrifiers who are oblivious to the intricacies of a vibrant and inclusive urban space, lacking any depth in their vision and thought process. Penelope confronts him by reaffirming that "There are people here, real people, who already have potential" (Coster 174). She notifies him that people living here never wanted them, and have their own history and background. Their attitude echoes the patronizing tone of colonial era oppressors, believing that they are bringing improvements and enlightenment to urban neighbourhoods deemed underdeveloped or in need of revitalization.

To mask the effects of gentrification in Bed-Stuy, a wave of trendy establishments emerges. "Next door, the hair salon spewed steam onto the street, the fried chicken spot, a jewelery shop with crucifixes and chains glittering on display, and the beauty supply store that blasted soca and flashed neon lights ... coffee shops that had opened farther east. Those had plush furniture and abstract art on the walls" (Coster 69-70). The long list of new establishments meticulously decorated and beautified created aesthetically pleasing spaces, catering to the contemporary tastes. This deliberate attempt to create visually appealing places by the gentrifiers has been the heart of discussion in Lindner and Sanoval's work. As they affirm that aestheticization is the new battlefield to gain control over the urban spaces, they also notify that this revitalization and "seduction has played an important role in attracting both people and capital to neighbourhoods" (Lindner and Sandoval 20). Ralph's and Penelope's attempts to combat the forces of gentrification end in futility due to this sole reason mentioned by Lindner and Sandoval, the inability to resist the aura of aestheticization.

Ralph pleads that these advancements and renovations are superficial: "Maybe on the surface. What about inside, hmm" (Coster 70). He inquires about the vitality of these superficial renovations, but he, along with his neighbourhood, succumbs to the gentrifying forces as the deployment of aestheticization as an armament becomes overbearing for them. Sara Schulman also backs this stance that gentrification is based on the assumption of "obedience to consumer identity over recognition of lived experience" (Schulman 51). It prioritizes the accumulation of material gains over the lives and stories of people. Sheckley's bar gets replaced by the revamped version

under new owner, Grand Records turns into Sprout, and most of the old enterprises get substituted. The new establishments offer a trendy ambiance, leaving the former owners clueless against the aesthetic forces, as the affluent migrants felt yearning for these seductive spaces. This conversion of older establishments into "places of desires and seduction" makes their footing strong, leaving the original migrants ousted. Meanwhile the gentrifiers keep representing themselves as Messiah, enforcing the narrative regarding them as the saviors of the neighbourhood from decay. They gazed at the local community scornfully, mirroring the condescending tone of colonial era oppressors.

One of Penelope's artworks perfectly encapsulates the essence of the whole situation and offers a powerful portrayal of neighbourhood transformations. She paints a gold car smashed by some other car at the intersection of two Brooklyn thoroughfares, symbolically capturing the contrast between the original character of the neighbourhood and the devastated version of it after the migrants. "Gold passenger car ... blown open at the center ... an impossible wreck" (Coster 116). The gold passenger car embodies the original residents, with its wrecked center signifying the catastrophes brought to their community. The intersection of Brooklyn thoroughfare symbolizes the influx of migrants, resulting in inevitable change, whereas the three lanes of traffic in both directions indicate the continuous influx of migrants, capital and culture. Her labelling of this wreck as impossible indicates the incomprehensible nature of gentrification, which results in the disintegration of the community's core in an unnatural way. The crowd of people gathered to witness the accident represents the stakeholders, gazing at the destruction of the original community. The empty center of the car underscores the loss of original inhabitants, along with the local culture, representing the hollowness and fading out of the community's original spirit. The physical structure remains intact, but the empty center verifies the hollowness of the locality, devoid of life and soul. By crafting these elements, Penelope captures the essence of the whole situation, underscoring the hollowing effects casted by gentrification on their community. The physical structure is left behind, spiritually and culturally vacated.

Through the extensive exploration of *Halsey Street (2018)*, this study uncovers the chameleonic face of the gentrifiers by exposing how underneath the alluring facade of revitalization, the detrimental effects are always lurking behind. These

tribulations are concealed through the process of aestheticization, creating a delusion of advancement and modernity. The novel offers a nuanced exploration of how the sensory hotspots of the neighbourhood, cardinal for nurturing the culture and promoting authenticity, are plundered in the wave of gentrification. These hotspots catered to the sensorium of the masses and resonated with their preferences. Their stagnation implies marginalization of the established community, resulting in their exclusion from their own land. Grand Records, PS 23 and Sheckley's are prime examples of hotspots lost to the tide of gentrification. The economic equilibrium of the neighbourhood gets disrupted in the wake of cataclysmic money brought in by the gentrifiers, which in turn dismantles the spatial structuring mandatory for the vibrant and inclusive urban space. This results in the displacement of the original inhabitants of Bed-Stuy. Characters like Ralph and Penelope also struggle to hold their ground. Communal integration and social cohesion also suffer, with new migrants casting a disdainful gaze upon the locals and branding them as unsafe to live with. Along with this, gentrification impedes community-centric cultural development, resulting in fostering inauthentic narratives and commodification of culture. Sheckley's bar becomes a paragon of this commodification, with the new owner having a parochial view of the neighbourhood, attempting to create a commodified space for monetary gains. All these ramifications lead to the conversion of Bedford-Stuyvesant into an exclusive enclave, pushing the original residents to the peripheries and alienating them in their own land with minimal participation in the mainstream activities. Finally, the deployment of aestheticization as a tool provides a fulcrum to the gentrifiers to yield their own narratives, forcing the local inhabitants to succumb to their agendas. Henceforth, they surrender to the overbearing pressures, remaining paralyzed and vulnerable.

4.2. Lisa Braxton's *The Talking Drum*: A Journey through Urban Renewal

The second text subjected to scrutiny in this study is Lisa Braxton's *The Talking Drum* (2020). Lisa Braxton is an American novelist and writer, with her debut novel *The Talking Drum* (2020) launching her to the spotlight. Her works often comprise exploration of displacement, racial tensions, and the impacts of urban renewal upon the societies, predominantly African American neighbourhoods.

Formerly a journalist, her writings are eulogized for navigating through multifarious themes with nonchalant ease, and for her artistry of dynamic character development. In addition to her works as a novelist, she also penned some persuasive essays, whereas her run as a television journalist nourished her observation and keenness.

Published in 2020, *The Talking Drum* (2020) underscores the themes of community, displacement, and cultural identity against the backdrop of urban revitalization. Braxton crafts a fictional city of Bellport, Massachusetts, setting her narrative in the 1970s. She constructs two parallel narratives forming the core of her story, tracing the lives of two couples, Sydney and Malachi Stallworth, and Omar Bassari and Natalie, through dual narratives that intersect and build upon each other. The narrative chiefly centers around the redevelopment of Petite Africa, a predominantly African American neighbourhood. The residents are coerced to migrate as the aftermaths of the urban redevelopment project get severe. The project claiming to bring new businesses, revamped infrastructure and promising prospects, results in cultural and socio-economic upheaval, leading to a fractured locality. Sydney and Malachi aspire to build a bookstore and cultural center, naming it *The Talking Drum*. They triumphantly establish their dream and make their bookstore an emblem of resistance and retaliation, attempting to preserve cultural heritage against the backdrop of impending challenges. Nonetheless, the calamities brought by gentrification cripple them, making them struggle to even keep their bookstore afloat and maintain their place in the community. Simultaneously, the novel captures the lives of Omar Bassari and Natalie. Natalie aspires to be an actress, whereas Omar carries his performances as a drummer, yearning to become the topmost drummer of the entire country. As the neighbourhood hits the urban renewal project, their relationship becomes strained, and all their aspirations get sidelined in a fleeting glance.

The present study attempts to probe the novel through the standpoint of gentrification and its aftermaths for the residents. Braxton skillfully portrays the transformations Bellport undergoes through, disrupting the notions of inclusivity and marginalizing the original inhabitants in their own backyard. Their aspirations, dreams, endeavours, everything becomes frighteningly insignificant for the gentrifying forces as they pursue their own ambitions, totally excluding the long-term

residents from the broader scheme of things. The novel offers to provide a nuanced look at the impact of urban renewal on the marginalized communities. Through characters like Omar and Sydney serving as a mouthpiece for Braxton, the narrative emphasizes the significance of cultural preservation and the resilience of the communities for combating the adversities.

The cardinal issue foregrounded by Lisa Braxton in *The Talking Drum* (2020) is the disintegration of the communal cohesion of Petite Africa, a neighbourhood she creates in the fictional city of Bellport. Gentrifiers ransack the surveillance system of the neighbourhood, leading to the disintegration of the communal cohesion. Recurringly, this theme is spotlighted with arsonists setting the fire at regular intervals, creating a pattern of deliberate and periodic destruction. The trust deficit of residents gets highlighted frequently. The incapacity of police and other institutions to safeguard the neighbourhood often becomes visible. The looming threat in the subconscious of residents becomes quite evident, and continuously makes them agitated. These all aspects elucidate the utter devastation of the surveillance system of the city. This plundering of the surveillance system of Petite Africa is a direct product of gentrification. Firstly, the gentrifying forces are seen to purposefully plunder the safety of the city. This paves their way for the attainment of their objectives and anchors them to carry out their rebuilding project. Secondly, the dynamics of gentrification contribute directly to the weakening of the surveillance system of the city. The cataclysmic money that comes with the tide of gentrification, obliterates the local small-scale enterprises. Once the small scale-enterprises are wiped out, the vibrant pedestrian activities that naturally take place on the city sidewalks diminish. Jacobs refers to those activities as “sidewalk ballet” (Jacobs 50), as they add to the beauty, complexity, and vibrancy of a city space. These activities are essential for the informal surveillance of an urban space, which Jane Jacobs appraises much more than the formal surveillance. Secondly, this obliteration results in the dismantling of spatial structuring deemed as mandatory by Jacobs for the inclusivity, as well as surveillance of the city. She regards small-scale enterprises as the most significant establishments for the surveillance of the city, as their proprietors assist in the natural surveillance of the streets. Additionally, these enterprises also result in the provision of “eyes on the street” by fostering the interaction among the community members (Jacobs 35). So,

the spatial structuring that caters to all the socioeconomic groups is obligatory for the vibrancy and safety of the city. The segregation on the basis of economic disparities “makes nothing but trouble in a society” (Jacobs 324). The urban space formed by segregating the low-income populations and wiping out their businesses is doomed to turmoil and upheaval, as it violates the spatial structuring mandatory for the surveillance of the city and leads to the disintegration of communal cohesion.

Right at the commencement of the novel, the neighbourhood of Petite Africa is set ablaze by arsonists. This straightaway sets the tone of the narrative, where the looming threat captivates the attention of the local dwellers all the time. Additionally, it augments the significance of the prevalent themes of surveillance fiasco and the disintegration of communal cohesion, as Braxton initiates her narrative picturizing both the communal cohesion and surveillance of the city plundered. Subsequently, the fires and the attempt to apprehend the arsonists becomes a recurring motif throughout the narrative. The arsonists persistently kept setting the fire, and the authorities kept yearning to catch the culprits, always falling short. “We have an arsonist setting fires. Petite Africa is being targeted” (Braxton 80). Jane Jacobs provides the rationale behind these futile attempts. She proclaims that the provision of surveillance by police or other authorities can never be deemed as reliable. Rather, she accentuates the dire need of informal surveillance, and holds the informal surveillance and communal cohesion accountable for the safety of an urban space. She notifies that the trust of an urban space emanates out of multiple sidewalk contacts over a period of time. “It grows out of people stopping by at the bar for a beer, getting advice from the grocer ...” (Jacobs 56). This implies that for the safety of any neighbourhood, it is essential that it evolves organically, resulting in multiple interactions amongst the residents periodically. When the inhabitants are living in an inclusive environment, being dependent on each other, the communal cohesion gets nurtured and vibrant activities on sidewalks take place. She holds those activities or “sidewalk ballet” accountable for surveillance of the city. Nevertheless, gentrification impedes those activities and coerces the residents to migrate, succumbing to the financial crisis. The affluent migrant class serves as their replacement, which restricts the interactions among the individuals due to the economic disparities and the parochial attitude of the migrants towards the locals. Jacobs ensures that such locality can never attain the status of a

safe haven, as she values informal surveillance much more than the provision of surveillance by the authorities. The spaces dependent upon police for the surveillance are labeled as “jungles” by her (Jacobs 32).

Throughout the narrative, the surveillance fiasco and the disintegration of communal cohesion keeps on surfacing. Natalie, wife of Omar Bassari, loses her child due to the fire set by arsonists. She gets dejected and undergoes Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, with her life irreparably altered consequently. Omar loses his lower body in the fire, getting handicapped, with hundreds of others losing their lives and shelters. Even the authorities yield to this fiasco, pleading the public to become their "eyes and ears" (Braxton 83), as they admit their vanquished state. Thus, it gets carved in every individual's consciousness that the neighbourhood is severely jeopardized. Sydney Stallworth, the protagonist, also confesses her agitation as the looming threat always keeps her apprehensive. All this scenario reverberates the detrimental effects brought by gentrification. Apart from displacing the low-income population, the ones managing the occupation of their space get segregated. This results in social fragmentation and dying down of the pedestrian activities or “sidewalk ballet”, held responsible for the surveillance by Jacobs. Additionally, the cataclysmic money brought in by the gentrifiers brings in calamities for the local, small-scale enterprises. They are coerced to terminate their businesses as the drastic price-hike becomes overbearing for them, excluding them from the mainstream. Uncle Mustapha, a central figure of Petite Africa and uncle of Omar Bassari, loses his long established cafe Le Baobab. Kwame's Rhythm and Blues also suffers the same fate, along with most of the other establishments of Petite Africa forced into closure. Meanwhile, Jacobs regards the owners of these small-scale enterprises as the "natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs 35), identifying them as responsible for the surveillance of the city. These enterprises yield the dynamic pedestrian activities by keeping the locality engaged, and the continuous presence of their keepers result in the provision of "eyes on the street" (Jacobs 35). These eyes on the street ensure that no suspicious activity takes place, resulting in the obliteration of doubtful activities. Every unfamiliar individual in the vicinity gets scrupulously examined by them. Jacobs believes that this “sidewalk ballet” cannot be enforced, rather takes place organically in an inclusive and rich urban environment. She asserts that: "Storekeepers and other small

businessmen are typically strong proponents of peace and order ... They are great street watchers and sidewalk guardians" (Jacobs 37). Whereas gentrification leads to their exclusion, displacing the long-established proprietors to seclusion. This impedes the sidewalk ballet and violates the equitable spatial structuring obligatory for catering all the socioeconomic groups, which in turn ravages the surveillance and communal cohesion of the urban space, putting the inhabitants in jeopardy.

The authorities of Petite Africa conduct an inquiry to unearth the causes behind the devastation of the city surveillance, and also arrange a briefing for the counseling of the residents to ensure that the precautionary measures are taken. They raise their concerns regarding the turmoil in the city, and plead the locals to provide their assistance as their vulnerability and inefficiency becomes evident. They confess their ineptness in the prevention of security debacle and beseech the local residents to become their "eyes and ears" (Braxton 83). This act by the authorities validates the notions of Jacobs regarding the informal surveillance, as she appraises the role of local communities much more than the formal authorities for turning an urban space into a sanctuary. Here, the chameleonic attitude of the authorities gets unveiled, as they previously assisted the gentrifying forces in displacing the local communities in pursuit of their own objectives. Once the gentrification starts and the spatial structuring essential for the city surveillance gets disrupted, only then they alter their views and start acknowledging the significance of the local communities. They also appeal to the masses to take preventive measures by themselves and make a plea that: "We want everyone to lock their doors" (Braxton 81). This proposal of locking the doors is the proposal of altering the thought patterns for the local inhabitants, as they always relied on their communal cohesion for their safety rather than these preventive measures. "The people down there in Petite Africa don't believe in locking their doors ... there's a difference in the way they do things down here" (Braxton 81). This showcases the level of integration their community had before the gentrification began to reshape the area. They were not reliant on the locks for their safety, rather their mutual interactions periodically nurtured their faith and reliance over each other. Whereas gentrification brings turmoil in their neighbourhood, fracturing the locality and creating trust deficit amongst the community members. Eventually, the coercion by the authorities forces them to make alterations in their living habits as they agree to

put the bolt locks on their doors, which is incongruous to their previous values. This augments the proposal of Carl White as discussed in the section of literature review, who contrasts gentrification with settler colonialism. He perceives gentrification as a microcosm of colonialism, with similar dynamics of displacement and cultural erasure. Similarly, this incident echoes the patronizing tone of the colonizers. A big population of the locals is already forced out, and the ones remaining behind are being pressured to conform to external influences, altering their lifestyles and values.

At the final juncture of the narrative, the truth behind the arsonists gets unveiled, as it becomes evident that the gentrifying forces willfully hired the arsonists to ravage the security of the neighbourhood in the pursuit of their own objectives. A character named James Fullerton hires Kwame and Lawrence to set the fires periodically at different points of the city to terrify the long-term inhabitants, so that they flee from their homeland. Their expulsion further ravages the safety of the neighbourhood as the equitable spatial structuring responsible for a secure urban space gets disrupted. The equitable spatial structuring leads to the interactions among the long-time inhabitants, which in turn yield vibrant activities and boost the trust amongst the community members, leading to the conversion of an urban space into a sanctuary. Their systematic exclusion signifies how the gentrifiers intentionally aggravate the disintegration of communal cohesion. These threatening incidents lead to the expulsion of locals, handing the land to the gentrifiers for the attainment of their ambitions. Jacobs assures that, "It does not take many incidents of violence on a city street, or in a city district, to make people fear the streets. ... It cannot be tagged as a problem of older parts of cities" (Jacobs 30-31). She explicitly highlights how this problem of surveillance is attributed to the rebuilt part of the cities, as the older parts evolve organically, yielding a dynamic environment responsible for the safety of the urban space. Moreover, she maintains that only a few threatening acts are sufficient for petrifying the inhabitants, resulting in their eviction from their own land. This explicates the treatment of the gentrifiers with the locality. They relentlessly wipe out the natives, without any regard for their properties or even lives. Hundreds of inhabitants get killed in these fires, yet the gentrifiers are hardly moved. This whole scenario reverberates the proposal of Brandi Thompson Summers who juxtaposes gentrification with colonialism and asserts that gentrifiers attempt to "tidy up urban

space by removing its residents" (Summers 122). Here, the word "tidy" underscores how low-income populations are envisaged by the gentrifiers, as if they are blemish on the face of their aesthetic vision. They attempt to sanitize the urban space, but not through organic evolution or progression of the suppressed classes, but mercilessly wiping out the lower socioeconomic classes for their own monetary gains. Hence, this unearths how the gentrifying forces purposefully disrupt the communal integration and equitable spatial structuring for plundering the urban space so that their ambitions get fulfilled. As Lindner and Sandoval proclaim, the sole focus of the gentrifying forces is in the production of "spaces of desire", intentionally displacing the lower socioeconomic classes (Lindner and Sandoval 15). Their idea of sanitization echoes the legacy of colonialism, producing spaces of desire at the cost of the obliteration of local inhabitants.

Apart from the fire incidents and arsonists, the recurring motif of the surveillance debacle keeps on surfacing in the narrative at multiple stages. Sydney Stallworth and her husband Malachi aspire to open a bookstore and a cultural center in their neighbourhood. They agree to name their store as The Talking Drum, aiming to establish a cultural hub for their community, and hoping that it would provide an assistance to the local community in the nourishment of their local culture and heritage. They aspired to provide a safe haven to the local culture, ensuring its preservation, whereas the bookstore was intended to promote education and awareness among the masses. Moreover, they wanted to establish a space reflecting their values and interests, so it was a source of personal fulfillment for them. However, the calamities brought by gentrification impede their aspirations. As gentrification brings in cataclysmic money in the form of large-scale investments, the local enterprises get priced out (Jacobs 293). This results in immense price-hike, producing insurmountable challenges for the local population. Sydney and Malachi also become victims of this inflation, struggling to even meet the exigencies of life. Consequently, they rent out their basement to the tenants, named as Inez and Willie. This decision of renting out backfires as the tenants commit a massive burglary, taking all of their possessions and clearing away their entire home. Their dreams of maintaining the culture center gets shattered, which they opened after severe struggle. Throughout the narrative, they endeavoured to open the culture center, and the

moment they succeed, the cultural center gets perished in a fleeting glance, as the financial crisis makes it arduous to maintain it. This incident signifies the impact of a fractured surveillance on the individuals. For them, their cultural center reflected their identity, as the whole community associated them with their center. Moreover, the opening of the center became possible after severe collective struggles and sacrifices. Yet, the burglars did not give it a second thought.

This incident of burglary symbolizes how gentrification smashes the lives of the individuals. Gentrification resulted in sky-rocketing prices, which compelled them to rent out their house without much investigation. The lack of investigation also traces its ties with gentrification, as the migrants were totally alien to their neighbourhood. There was lack of acquaintance amongst the local dwellers and the migrants, which led to the security debacle. Furthermore, as the small-scale enterprises face expulsion, along with the local population evicted, the failure of surveillance of the neighbourhood becomes inevitable, as Jacobs regards them cardinal for the safety of an urban space and labels them as "natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs 35). Willie and Inez, the paying guests, kept on rehearsing for the burglary even at nighttime, yet no one was able to discern their motives, which signifies the importance of a community that evolves organically and periodically. "Every so often I heard a sound like that ... They were probably practicing" (Braxton 251). This showcases the utter devastation of their surveillance. A community that evolves organically, hosts the activities mandatory for a secure environment. The displacement of the local population, along with the expulsion of local entrepreneurs, leads to the situation where burglars keep on rehearsing for the theft, but hardly get monitored due to the lack of "sidewalk ballet" and "eyes on the street" (Jacobs 35). On the other hand, the older city spaces act as sanctuaries, where every suspicious activity gets monitored under the supervision of local entrepreneurs, and every unfamiliar individual in the vicinity gets scrupulously examined by the locals. The trust gradually rises to a point where inhabitants become unapprehensive and interact in a peaceful environment. Whereas in this case, the influx of migrants makes it difficult for Sydney and Malachi to investigate the background of the paying guests, as they are alien to their neighbourhood. Additionally, the inflation due to the price-hike handicaps them, impelling them to rent out their basement hastily. Therefore, all

their misfortune gets attributed to the adversities brought in by gentrification. The financial strain, a direct product of cataclysmic money, compels them to rent out their basement hastily, and the demographic shifts in the neighbourhood already sabotaged the fundamentals of equitable and secure urban space, which could have safeguarded them from this calamity. Not only they suffer financially, but their whole identity and aspirations get sabotaged, with all their endeavours going in vain.

The cultural erosion is also accentuated in Braxton's *The Talking Drum* (2020). The failure of Sydney and Malachi in the pursuit of their aspiration of maintaining a cultural hub for the community is not merely a personal loss, rather a communal loss. Their center was aimed to be a sanctuary for the cultural heritage and its preservation, which makes it vital for the neighbourhood. It aimed to provide access to the resources for the public to assist them in the reflection of their past and celebration of their identity. "Our Talking Drum is going to break it down for the people, teach them ... We'll expand on the cultural aspect. It'll be a research center" (Braxton 09-10). By offering a venue for cultural events, the center was mandatory for keeping the cultural fabric of the community intact, particularly in the face of external pressures and societal changes. However, gentrification brings disruptions in the cultural continuity by making demographic shifts in the locality, along with turmoil in the economic equilibrium of the neighbourhood. This symbolizes the broader cultural displacement in the wake of gentrification, in which economic shifts are accompanied by cultural shifts. The center that was of paramount importance for spotlighting the unique cultural characteristics gets overshadowed with the replacement of affluent migrants. This replacement signifies the cultural erasure, as the space vital for fostering the local narratives and cultural preservation gets sabotaged. The authenticity of the local culture vanishes in the gentrified spaces, leaving behind a commodified version, stereotyping the masses rather than their authentic representation. Lindner and Sandoval regard this as "cultural gentrification" (Lindner and Sandoval 17). The social cohesion, identity, and cultural practices of the natives get relentlessly squandered by the gentrifying forces. The original culture embodying richness and authenticity gets replaced with a superficial, inauthentic version, lacking richness and vitality. Hence, with the decline of the cultural center, the prophecy made by Sydney

gets fulfilled as she proclaimed that the development of the neighbourhood would “cost the people their way of life” (Braxton 137).

Uncle Mustapha's restaurant Le Baobab was another social hub for Petite Africa. His restaurant offered cuisines that catered to the preferences of the masses and resonated their preferences, as Mustapha affirms that he spent years in "building reputation for Le Baobab " (Braxton 145). When Sydney and Della visit his restaurant for the first time, they notice the unique offerings the restaurant had which resonated with the local culture. He presents them ginger mango lemonade right away, which was specifically adored by the locals. As proposed by David Howes, the sensory perceptions of humans never exist in a natural state, rather it is a product of cultural and societal contexts. Although the human sensory abilities are innate, their development and refinement are dependent on the cultural and environmental factors. (Howes 3). This signifies the importance of Le Baobab, which serves as an epicenter for the provision of cuisines catering to the preferences of the locals. Mustapha himself proclaims that his restaurant specially prioritizes the cooking of food as per the preferences of the neighbourhood. "Fresh food, lambs, fish ... the way they like it. Not like in America" (Braxton 146). Hence, his restaurant establishes himself as the sensory hotspot for the neighbourhood. Sensory hotspots refer to those spaces where sensory experiences, such as sight, sound, or smell, are particularly intense or noteworthy. The neighbourhood holds strong associations with Le Baobab, which is not merely a physical space for them, rather serves as an emotional territory and a memory-laden space. Such hotspots are vital for the cultural nourishment of the culture as they foster the interactions among the locals, yielding dynamic activities. They provide safe haven for the residents for introspection, and provide unique offerings not only for the gratifying their tastes, but also for playing their role in shaping their sensory perceptions, as Howes claims that sensory perceptions evolve within a particular culture.

The revitalization project wipes out Le Baobab, eventually leading to Mustapha's death. "They destroy all that I have. They give me money but it is very little" (Braxton 266). Mustapha persistently protests and tries to impede the gentrifiers from obliterating his restaurant, however they were adamant of destroying it and only offer him modest financial assistance. This whole scenario signifies the lack of

empathy gentrifiers have for the locals, and eventually leads to the death of Mustapha, succumbing to the pressures. This incident epitomizes how gentrification shatters the lives of individuals. His restaurant was a social hub and epicenter for the provision of cuisines resonating the preferences of the masses and served as a sensory hotspot for the neighbourhood. It played a vital role in nourishment of the culture through the promotion of interactions in a dynamic and secure space, and also in shaping the preferences of the residents within a particular environment. The diminishing of such hotspots in the face of adversities brought by gentrification exemplifies the devastating role of gentrification not only for the individuals, but for the culture and societal cohesion. It signifies that the natives stand marginalized in their own homeland. Their cultural nourishment gets hindered, as the sanctuary mandatory for the provision of secure interactions gets wiped out. Furthermore, the space obligatory for the shaping and evolution of their preferences in an authentic environment gets vandalized. Consequently, the cultural nourishment gets impeded, as the new spaces formed are inauthentic, developed by the external forces rather than the engagement of local communities. Lindner and Sandoval notify that: “Gentrification commodifies local culture, creates inauthentic local narratives, and leads inexorably to displacement and expulsion” (Lindner and Sandoval 21). They testify that gentrification turns local culture into a marketable product by distorting the authenticity, eventually pushing out the people who originally lived and worked there. Similarly, Mustapha’s restaurant gets snatched by the gentrifiers for its conversion into a marketable place, which in turn leads to his expulsion and death. The locals do not develop any association with the new establishments, as they lacked authenticity, whereas La Baobab was an emotional territory, a memory-laden space for them, which played a pivotal role in the nourishment of their civilization over the years. The demographic shifts that take place afterwards result in the creation of inauthentic local narratives and superficiality, as the new spaces are shaped by external forces. Edward T. McMahon also mirrors this notion that growth is inevitable, however it may not come at the cost of community character.

“Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not” (qtd. in Cheshmehzangi 17). Growth does not imply bringing devastation in the community’s social fabric, rather it should reverberate organic evolution through

contribution by the masses. Growth without equity is not an indicator of advancement, rather a calamity.

The character Omar Bassari, playing a lead role in the concurrent narrative, also reflects upon how gentrification stifles the cultural expression and aspirations of the original inhabitants. Omar envisions himself as a top-notch drummer, and dreams of spreading his culture globally through his drumming skills. He wanted to bring his father's vision to life who endorsed his skills and motivated him by saying: "You will spread the True African culture to the world through drumming" (Braxton 95). Drumming comprises rhythmic language transcending the borders of geography, language and temporality. The rhythm and beats of a drum embody the spirit and ethos of a culture, preserving the cultural authenticity. Furthermore, it acts as an archive for history and values of a community, fostering the sense of belonging and unity amongst the community members. In Omar's culture, drumming was deeply enmeshed with their cultural identity, tradition, and their cultural practices. It was more than just a musical expression for Omar; it was an influential medium for the promotion and sustainability of his culture. However, gentrification relentlessly ravages all his aspirations. Firstly, he gets evicted from his home as the shattering of economic equilibrium makes it insurmountable for him to pay his rents. He shifts to an impoverished neighbourhood, hardly able to meet his expenditures, which leads to a fractured relationship with his wife. She pressurizes him to quit his drumming to meet the growing financial demands. He laments his situation, feebly witnessing all his dreams shattering. Later on, the arsonists set a fire in his vicinity. That fire makes him lose his hand, along with the major portion of his lower body, leaving him handicapped. That fire is also closely tied to gentrification, as it is aforementioned that the fire was deliberately set on the commands of the gentrifying forces. The security debacle which occurs as a result of wiping out the local communities is also attributed to gentrification. Hence, this incident is a paragon of how gentrification obliterates the locals from their scheme of things. The hands were not merely a physical part of the body for Omar, they were also the instruments through which he expressed his identity and his heritage by the display of his drumming skills. The loss of his hands signifies the loss of the hands of the community, who witness the devastation of their culture and community helplessly. Drumming was a way of communication for Omar.

The seizure of his skill through snatching his hands implies the seizure of his communication skills, leading to silencing of his culture. His inability to continue his drumming due to the fire is metaphoric of the loss of cultural heritage and the helplessness of the community in safeguarding it as the gentrification hits the area. Firstly the gentrifiers set the fire purposefully, and more importantly, gentrification already brought turmoil in their surveillance system by excluding the local enterprises and low-income populations. As noted earlier, If those segments of the society survived, the security fiasco would not have reached to this point where an arsonist can get away without any accountability, bringing catastrophes in the lives of the original inhabitants.

To conceal the widespread impacts of gentrification, gentrifiers deploy their most trusted tool; aestheticization. As Lindner and Sandoval asserted, sensory appeal and aesthetics of urban spaces are no longer a matter of taste, rather a powerful tool in urban power dynamics. They regard them as the "battlegrounds" for the attainment of control over cities (Lindner and Sandoval 15). Hence, gentrifiers fully exploit this phenomenon by conversion of old spaces into "spaces of desire and seduction" (Lindner and Sandoval 15). In *Halsey Street (2018)*, the masses disparaged the gentrifying forces, but the gentrifiers became self-proclaimed Messiahs and manipulated revitalization to build a narrative, labelling themselves as the saviours of the neighbourhood. Whereas in this narrative, the majority tends to conform to the gentrifiers and their revitalization project. Like the security debacle, this theme of conformity to the gentrifying forces, succumbing to their urban renewal project becomes a recurring motif. Consequently, the manipulation and expulsion gets overlooked on the large scale, as gentrification camouflages the adversities under visually appealing spaces of desire.

A sufficient number of local dwellers seemed to adore the renewal project, turning blind eye to the detrimental effects. Kwame epitomizes the aspirations of locals tied to the renewal project and ensures his wife that it is going to bring prosperity and advancement to their neighbourhood. "Once they build that civic center, this place is gonna light up. We'll get restaurants, high-priced shops. We'll make a killing" (Braxton 15). Characters like Omar, Mustapha, and Sydney register their contempt for the gentrifiers and show their bewilderment about locals supporting

the project. Sydney gets baffled when Kwame eulogizes the renewal project and clarifies to him that, "It's good for the economy ... but it's not right to take people's homes" (Braxton 44). However, Kwame maintains his stance that it is going to be prosperous for the neighbourhood and there would be plenty of fascinating activities like "the concerts and the sporting events" (Braxton 45). He even maintains that the surveillance would eventually get better, becoming oblivious to the fact that it has already brought turmoil in the security of their neighbourhood.

Cass R. Sunstein provides a rationale which can be deployed to discern the locals' tendency to conform to the gentrifiers. He reflects upon how the higher powers play their role in the formation of "reputational cascades", through making use of fashion leaders and influential personalities as their instruments for the creation of narratives and reputation. (Sunstein 72). In the context of *The Talking Drum* (2020), brands like *The Fierce Warriors* seem to fulfil these duties by carrying on the concerts, fostering the reputation of the new establishments. Furthermore, the gentrifiers pursue the matter legally and get the decision in their favour through power and influence, which makes their renewal project officially sanctioned. This way, they exploit "expressive function of the law", which implies that laws have symbolic value and shape social norms, communicating what is acceptable and what is erroneous (Sunstein 101). Characters like Mustapha keep on their protest, but all their efforts end in futility.

They keep on pleading that "Save Our Homes", "No Damn Expressway Ramp" (Braxton 138), but legal defeat creates a hoax in the minds of masses that the renewal project is beneficiary. Consequently, the individuals tend to develop a "compliance cascade" as it goes unquestioned (Sunstein 104). Through the formation of a compliance cascade, people accentuate the views of others in their community, creating a continuous chain and making the oblivious people comply with them as they become victims of "availability heuristic"; a cognitive bias overestimating the likelihood of present information to be true (Sunstein 74).

The gentrifiers manipulate techniques and create a narrative of their essentiality for the neighbourhood which locals embrace in the name of revitalization, leaving the few dissenters bewildered about the scheme of things. They deploy the influential personalities to build up a reputational cascade, and then get the legal

sanctions for exploiting the expressive function of the law. This in turn makes compliance cascade and gives the gentrifiers “rhetorical advantage” (Sunstein 90) over the dissenters, leaving the protestors handicapped. Once this rhetorical advantage gets established, people become victims of “reactive devaluation”, which implies the dismantling of notions on the basis of source rather than cognitive basis. (Sunstein 11). Hence, the voices of protestors get suppressed as gentrifiers already established a rhetorical advantage over them. Omar gets in skirmishes with several people as they mocked him for protesting. The masses become delusional, nullifying the perspective of protestors and embracing the proposals of gentrifiers. "Omar couldn't believe it. People have accepted the demolition" (Braxton 57).

The gentrifiers skillfully exploit and create a narrative of their essentiality for the neighbourhood, which locals embrace in the name of revitalization, leaving the few dissenters bewildered about the scheme of things. Omar and Mustapha keep retaliating, with all their efforts going in vain, as people affirmed that, “If the city wants to give us a decent amount for this place, we’ll take it” (Braxton 210). After bringing all the aforementioned calamities to the neighbourhood, the gentrifiers panegyryze their contribution in the revitalization of the area, and rather than resisting, people wholeheartedly embraced their perspective. "The applause was thunderous. People whistled and cheered" (Braxton 288). This spotlights Lindner and Sandoval's assertion as they regarded aesthetics as the new battlefield. The neighbourhood gets plundered, evicting the masses, obliterating the authenticity of the culture, but a major chunk of the population wholeheartedly embraces all this in the name of revitalization. They get allured by the trendy establishments, becoming oblivious to the adversities. “I hear they’re gonna fix it up real good ... They’re gonna build a marina” (Braxton 195). They keep on applauding the project whereas gentrifiers keep on their agenda of “eat coconuts while you have teeth” (Braxton 63).

Through the comprehensive analysis of Lisa Braxton's *The Talking Drum* (2020), this study uncovers the prevalent theme of security fiasco and traces its close ties with gentrification. As gentrification begins reshaping the area, the equitable spatial structuring gets dismantled, which in turn brings disruptions in the communal cohesion and impedes the "sidewalk ballet". This leads to the plundering of informal surveillance, which holds much more significance for the safety of an area compared

to formal surveillance as revealed in this study. The gentrification leads to the expulsion of the masses which creates the security debacle, fracturing the locality. This brings adversities for the local inhabitants, and societal disintegration and security debacle becomes a recurring motif in the novel. Eventually, the gentrifiers attempt to conceal the adversities through aestheticization, which is not well received by few dissenters, however masses become victims of their propaganda and conform to their notions. Hence, the assertion of Linder and Sandoval that aesthetics serve as the battlefield in contemporary era for maintaining control over the urban spaces gets validated, as the masses are seen to prioritize the trendy establishments and superficial renovations in the neighbourhood over their cultural authenticity and societal integration.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

At the heart of this study are three key research questions that frame the exploration of gentrification in the selected texts. First, it examines how gentrified spaces are aestheticized to obscure the tribulations caused by gentrification, revealing the deliberate transformation of localities into "spaces of desire" that mask the displacement of marginalized communities. Second, the research investigates the influx of "cataclysmic money," highlighting its role in destabilizing the economic equilibrium of urban spaces by driving up costs and excluding local populations. Finally, it probes how gentrification disrupts spatial structures and community-centric cultural development, emphasizing the dismantling of sensory hotspots, the marginalization of local enterprises, and the breakdown of social cohesion. This results in the imposition of commodified, inauthentic culture. These inquiries, thoroughly addressed throughout the study, underscore the layered consequences of gentrification as portrayed in *Halsey Street* (2018) and *The Talking Drum* (2020), thereby encapsulating the broader implications for urban renewal and cultural displacement.

This study probed the lives of local communities in the midst of gentrification through the scrutiny of two selected texts; *Halsey Street* (2018) by Naima Coster and *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton. Through comprehensive scrutiny of these texts, this study showcases how gentrification brings turmoil in localities, relentlessly squandering the notions of equity. Gentrification brings upheavals in the localities in obscure ways. The elements brought in by the tide of gentrification yield irreparable damages, leaving the local inhabitants ousted from their own backyard. The study particularly spotlighted the influx of cataclysmic money, and its role in bringing disruptions in the economic equilibrium of an urban space. The shattered economic equilibrium makes it arduous for the locals to stand their ground in the wake of immense price-hike. Rather than organic evolution, the money brought in the form of upscale investments becomes responsible for the eviction of locals. Hence, this study emphasizes the significance of local-community involvement in the growth of an urban space, emphasizing its significance for inclusivity. Furthermore, the present study undertaken unveils how urban renewal driven by external forces leads to

superficiality and commodification of the local culture. It leads to the promotion of inauthentic narratives, ravaging the authenticity and richness of the culture. The spirit and soul of the locality get wiped out, masking it with the spaces of "seduction and desire". Moreover, gentrification does severe damage to the equitable spatial structuring mandatory for the vibrancy and safety of a neighbourhood. The equitable use of spaces catering to all socioeconomic classes leads to inclusivity and vibrancy. It also holds paramount significance for the surveillance of an area, as the "mixture of uses" fosters interactions amongst the community members, leading to dynamic activities mandatory for the informal surveillance. However, gentrifiers disparage these notions and sabotage this inclusive spatial structuring, gradually leading to eviction of the masses and creating severe security debacles for the neighbourhoods. This research unravels how gentrifiers attempt to conceal these adversities under the veneer of aesthetics. They solely shift their focus on the production of "spaces of desire", intentionally displacing the lower socioeconomic classes. They offer the prospect of revitalized neighbourhoods, adorned with trendy establishments that resonate with the contemporary tastes, creating a delusion of advancement. However, the catastrophes it brings and the irreparable damage it casts to the neighbourhood are always lurking behind, leaving the original inhabitants ostracized.

In conclusion, the celebration of transculturality and diversity, as promoted by cultural studies, is often appropriated to serve the interests of late capitalism. Gentrification transforms this celebration into a commodified vision that prioritizes corporate profit over the preservation of local culture. While presenting an image of inclusive development, it ultimately leads to the erasure of indigenous identities and the displacement of original communities. This superficial embrace of diversity masks the deeper, detrimental impacts of cultural homogenization and economic exploitation, exposing how such values are manipulated within the forces of gentrification.

Through the exploration of Naima Coster's *Halsey Street* (2018), the present situates all these adversities primarily in the context of sensory hotspots and their dismantling. The study skillfully forefronts the significance of sensory hotspots for the neighbourhood, as they play a cardinal role in the nourishment of local culture, promoting authenticity. All of the hotspots exhibited in the narrative get wiped out by

the gentrifying forces. This study elucidates how these hotspots catered to the sensorium of the masses and resonated with their preferences. Their stagnation implied marginalization of the established community, resulting in their exclusion. The economic disruptions, cultural gentrification, disruption of equitable spatial structuring, all these elements get exposed at the same juncture, as they collectively play their role in the obliteration of these hotspots, which in turn bring catastrophes for the local dwellers in numerous ways. Their economy gets fractured, their culture gets perished, and their natural spatial structuring gets plundered, leading to their expulsion. So, in

Naima Coster's narrative, all the detrimental effects of gentrification are primarily traced through the politics of hotspots in this study.

Through the scrutiny of *The Talking Drum* (2020) by Lisa Braxton, the study foregrounds the dire need of small-scale enterprises and equitable spatial structuring for the surveillance and communal cohesion of an urban space. Security fiasco becomes a recurring motif in Braxton's narrative, underscoring the necessity of informal surveillance. This study uncovers the significance of informal surveillance and societal integration, appraising it much more than the provision of surveillance by the authorities. The neighbourhood crafted by Braxton initially depended on the natural surveillance and social cohesion for its safety, however, as gentrification begins to reshape the area, all their notions get sidelined. The study unearths the essentiality of small-scale enterprises and social cohesion for the safety of an area, fostering the significance of informal surveillance in the security of an urban space. The moment gentrifiers take the charge, small-scale enterprises get evicted, along with expulsion of the low-income population in major chunks. This impedes the natural surveillance of an area, along with bringing impediments in the interactions amongst the local community members responsible for yielding dynamic activities, which in turn ensured the safety of an urban space. This results in the eviction of natural guardians of the neighbourhood, along with disintegration of communal cohesion, resulting in an uncontrollable security debacle in the area, which becomes the central theme and recurring motif of the narrative. Through exploration of this security fiasco and communal disintegration, the research traces its close ties to gentrification and debunks the narrative of the gentrifying forces, as it plunders the

space in an incomprehensible way, fracturing the elements mandatory for an inclusive and secure space.

Both the novels foreground the pervasive effects of gentrification for an urban space. However, the study approaches both the narratives differently to uncover the adversities. In *Halsey Street* (2018), the present study illustrates the turmoil in the neighbourhood through the politics of sensory hotspots and its seizure by the gentrifying forces, whereas in Braxton's narrative, the ramifications are spotlighted through the portrayal of surveillance fiasco and communal disintegration. The gentrifiers in both the narratives attempt to conceal the tribulations brought by them through the conversion of old spaces into the "space of desires and seduction", in which they eventually succeed by portraying themselves as saviours and Messiah for the neighbourhoods. Hence, the use of aestheticization as an armament becomes effective for them as they succeed in propagating their narrative.

Gentrification is often associated with economic revitalization, improved infrastructure, and enhanced urban aesthetics. As wealthier residents move into previously underdeveloped neighborhoods, they bring increased investment, leading to better housing, modernized public spaces, and improved amenities such as parks, schools, and healthcare facilities. Small businesses and cultural institutions can thrive due to increased foot traffic and consumer spending, contributing to local economic growth. By preserving historical architecture and promoting artistic and cultural activities, gentrification can also foster a vibrant and diverse urban environment, attracting a mix of social and economic classes. However, as explored in this study, these benefits should not come at the cost of displacing long-term residents or erasing local cultural identities. By adopting inclusive urban planning, policies can ensure that gentrification does not marginalize existing communities. Jane Jacobs' emphasis on mixed-use neighborhoods and local enterprise participation provides a model for sustainable urban renewal where economic growth does not push out vulnerable populations. Rent control policies, affordable housing initiatives, and community-driven development projects can help mitigate the negative effects of rising property values. Additionally, Lindner & Sandoval's critique of seductive spaces highlights the need to balance aestheticization with social equity, ensuring that urban beautification does not serve as a façade for exclusion. By integrating these strategies, gentrification

can contribute to urban progress without perpetuating social and economic inequalities.

Future scholars might consider expanding the scope of gentrification by its intersection with psychogeography, for comprehensive exploration of how urban renewal impacts individuals and their emotional and psychological experiences in a given space. Moreover, they might consider engaging in comparative analysis across various genres. It can also be explored through an intersectional lens, probing its intersection with broader issues like racism, sexism, classism, and ableism in literary works. A comparative analysis of literary works across different regions and cultures can be productive for uncovering its universal themes, as well as its unique perspectives. Furthermore, exploring underrepresented voices, historical contextualization, and transnational perspectives can also result in the provision of valuable insights. By carrying out these research projects, researchers can continue to spotlight the complex dynamics of gentrification and its effects on individuals and communities.

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