

## **The impact of gentrification on the refugee community: Interfacing practical theology and human geography**

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### **Abstract**

Any development project of a neighbourhood that leads to the forceful and involuntary relocation of existing residents is unjust and contrary to God's desire for life in its fullness and human flourishing. This paper looks at the lived experiences of African refugees in the socially and spatially polarised South African cities as they attempt to find space for themselves and for their businesses in order to survive. The paper provides insights on the notion of plurality and urban public space by taking into consideration the practice of gentrification in South Africa vis-à-vis the wellbeing of displaced communities. From the analysis of data gathered, gentrification accentuates socio-spatial polarisation and residential segregation in major South African cities, which calls for the need to de-gentrify urban cities for the sake of holistic community transformation. This is evidenced in the hopelessness and the helplessness of displaced communities as well as the quality of life they lead. De-gentrifying the previously gentrified space could lead to the transformation that communities need. The way gentrification is practiced in South Africa does not promote social cohesion or lead to holistic transformation. Rather, it reinforces social exclusion and holds back people's hope for improved wellbeing.

### **Keywords**

*Gentrification; theology of development; human migration; improved wellbeing; holistic transformation*

## 1. Introduction

South African cities are designed in a way that suggests residential segregation. This is evidenced in that the centre is for wealthy people and the periphery for the poor. The former are whites, and the latter are blacks. Cape Town is arguably one of the most gentrified cities in South Africa considering “the deepening social and spatial polarisation” in the city and, particularly, the fact that “the city is becoming ever more expensive [and] exclusive” (Buyer 2009; Booyens 2012). However, the city is also home to hundreds of thousands of migrants, particularly refugees.<sup>1</sup> In this regard, a number of questions could be asked: to what extent does the refugee phenomenon become linked to the process of gentrification in the contemporary South African urban context? How does socio-spatial polarisation in South African cities shape the lived experiences of refugee migrants? Do refugee migrants have any hope for improved wellbeing considering the gap between the two divides in the cities? What can we learn from the history of social exclusion in South Africa? What new ways of thinking about the historical removals can break through the polarised discourses to steer us towards a shared understanding of South African social future? I went to Bellville, an area within the metropolitan neighbourhoods of Cape Town to find answers to some of these and similar questions.

As it were, the gap between the powerful and the powerless continues to widen in South Africa while a growing caste emerges in the interval (Booyens, Molotja & Phiri 2013). The Cape Town metropolis and its urban environs are no different considering that the apartheid legislation already left a legacy of polarisation at various levels of the social fabric (Booyens 2012). This is because the context of South African urban cities is characterised by removals that had (and still have) wide-ranging effects on the local people (Didier, Morange & Peyroux 2013).<sup>2</sup> Such spatial shifts entail the geopolitical process of gentrification, in most cases fuelled by

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1 Here, and throughout, the term “refugees” is used inclusively of asylum seekers and all those in refugee-related situations such as those awaiting the appeal decision after receiving the rejection letter from the department of home affairs.

2 During the apartheid regime, blacks were forcibly removed from their original places to make space for whites’ settlements and new developments.

profitability and driven by urbanisation to the detriment of forcibly displaced communities as Ley (2010) finds.

## **2. Methodological considerations**

This study followed the interpretive paradigm as, arguably, it is through this paradigm that the voices and concerns of research participants could be heard. Here, the phenomenon under investigation required analysis rather than measurement or statistics, which justifies the preference of the interpretive paradigm and the consequential choice for the qualitative approach to this study. The manner in which fieldwork was conducted was through one-on-one interviews. In some cases, informal one-on-one conversational interviews were preferred and, in other cases, focus groups discussions constituted the method of choice. All interviews were in non-threatening environments where the participants could feel comfortable to discuss their opinions and experiences without fear that they will be judged or ridiculed. Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured way in order to enable participants express themselves without any discomfort while providing depth rather than breadth of needed information. For data analysis, ATLAS.ti was used.

## **3. The context of gentrification and de-gentrification in South Africa**

After 1994, the newly elected democratic government of South Africa made concessions to welcome refugee migrants to return the favour for the support accorded to the African National Congress (ANC) liberation movement by most African countries during the apartheid period (cf. Borel-Saladin, 2013). Waves of refugees from sub-Saharan Africa started coming to South Africa following the comprehensive reform involving the de-officialization of apartheid and the democratisation of the country (cf. Palmary 2002). In this regard, South Africa could be said to be one of the few countries in the world to have gone through a complete continuum of migratory movements, from being one of the most refugee-producing countries in the world to becoming one of the leading host countries.

Nevertheless, because the South African immigration regulations do not make it easy for the citizens of other African countries to settle and integrate

in the country (cf. Buyer 2009), a large number of African migrants opt to “become” asylum seekers after having been in the country for a while on a visa. This they do in order to live in the country much longer and, possibly, *ad infinitum* upon acquiring a permanent residence permit. In view of this, applications for seeking asylum go beyond the government’s expectation, which eventually affects its functionality and leads to tremendous irregularities within the refugee system (Conway 2014).

The caring and protective nature of the refugee system as per the UN 1951 Convention has become one of control in South Africa as Nyamnjoh and Brudvig (2014) assert. This has increased the intolerant desire by the government to reduce the number of immigrants using strict measures and to prevent their entry into the country through restrictive regulations. Existing studies on the refugee phenomenon in South Africa (see, for example, Borel-Saladin 2013; Crankshaw 2012) highlight the processing of asylum applications by the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) because without the “right papers” finding work in South Africa as a refugee is seemingly an insurmountable challenge. The studies also tend to only highlight the aptitude of refugee migrants when it comes to networking, and underline aspects of their social organisation, which often promote strong internal cohesion while they demand access to public space (Dorman 2014).

Gentrification has affected and still affects Cape Town in a particular way (cf. Didier et al. 2013; Booyens et al. 2013; Booyens 2012). This research was conducted in some of the most gentrified cities in South Africa including Johannesburg and Cape Town. In Bellville, a notorious Cape Town neighbourhood, refugee migrants are faced with the dilemma for space because they do not actually belong to a local community and are not allowed to own property (Borel-Saladin 2013). Refugees are considered outsiders because, in the South African worldview, only autochthony could grant someone the right for authentic belonging (Greenburg & Polzer 2008; see also Lees, 2010). The Bellville central business district (CBD) happens to be one of the places where the history of gentrification is a constant reminder of social exclusion for the majority of South African citizens. This assertion is equally shared by Nyamnjoh and Brudvig (2014:221) when they argue that it is in Bellville that the previously excluded citizens together

with a large number of refugee migrants currently find means to improve their livelihoods notwithstanding the many challenges they face.

Gentrification could be explained in various ways as it has multiple definitions. It is seen as a concept that perpetuates a particular form of bourgeoisie through the arrival of a population with high social standard in a popular urban space and the rehabilitation of its housing to suit the level of the new inhabitants. This sees the wealthy classes flocking and rubbing shoulders more and more with the popular classes. The result is expected to be a profound community transformation but, in most cases, unfortunately, it often results in the displacement of the original population. Invented by a Marxist sociologist about London in the 1960s, the term gentrification originally had a critical significance in denouncing the ousting of the inner city's working classes (Glass 1964).

Gentrification could also take the form of the affluent protecting their space in such a way that the less wealthy cannot afford living in the area. In this instance, the affluent landowners would, for example, raise the rental fee systematically so that only the affluent could afford renting in the neighbourhood or buying property there. Thus, gentrification is part of a broader context of occupying space by pushing a certain section of the populace farther to the margin. This explains why Ley (1994) finds that the process of gentrification begins with modifying people's needs rather than the structural changes in housing market. In other words, gentrification has manifold implications including, on the one hand, hope for socio-economic development and, on the other hand, likelihood for social exclusion (Pattaroni Kaufmann & Thomas 2012; Bidou-Zachariassen & Poltorak 2008; Glass 1964). When gentrification occurs, "most of the original working-class occupiers [get] displaced" after realising that they no longer fit in the now gentrified setting (Glass 1964). In that case the less privileged residents are forced to relocate from their original space. In South Africa, this has a race element in it, which makes refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa to feel doubly the effects of gentrification due to both their blackness and their foreignness. Such patterns are markedly observable in cities such as Bellville in Cape Town, and Hillbrow in Johannesburg (cf. Turok 2001; Borel-Saladin 2013).

Gentrification always raises the debate on land ownership in South Africa, which is often sensitive as it brings painful memories to many (Turok 2001). As it were, during the apartheid administration, black people had the right to come to town only to work but not reside there. In most urban cities, the separation between racial groups was more violently applied. In Cape Town, for example, the city still bears the painful memory of District 6, a district considered too cosmopolitan. Hundreds of thousands were evicted and relocated tens of kilometres away to form the townships of Cape Flats. At the moment, the city of Cape Town is spatially polarised. There is a need therefore to break this socio-spatial polarisation and de-gentrify the city back to its original state to solve this inequality.

In some areas in the Cape Town neighbourhoods, de-gentrification<sup>3</sup> is starting to happen. Bellville is one area where this is evident. De-gentrification is therefore the opposite of gentrification. It is itself a community transformation process that has taken a new turn. It appears as an advanced form of human migration – one that affects a sizable segment of the population previously excluded from socio-economic development. Bellville is quite a complex neighbourhood and, therefore, what happens there can only be described in terms of that same complexity. Gentrification in South Africa was definitely a practical tool for the apartheid system to proceed with “separate development” and, in the process, drive the poor out of the city while perpetuating segregation. This explains why de-gentrification is of necessity in South African cities and why plurality suggests changes in demographics and consumption patterns (Pattaroni et al. 2012).

One would say, such changes indicate that Bellville is getting de-gentrified. The complexity of Bellville’s realities vis-à-vis socio-spatial polarisation cannot be overemphasised. Ivan Turok (2001:2349) attests that the South African cities particularly Cape Town and its surrounding neighbourhoods is generally a “starkly polarised city” in view of the fact that “affluent suburbs and prosperous economic centres [offer] rich opportunities of all

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3 De-gentrification is the opposite process of gentrification. For example, a residential area that was previously affordable only for affluent individuals becomes affordable for those who are poorer. It is used to indicate a plan by people who were once pushed to the margin to occupy space in the centre or the gentrified area.

kinds”. This is in contrast with the “overcrowded, impoverished dormitory settlements on the periphery” as Turok’s (2001) observes. Turok’s observation provides pointers to the actual situation in South African cities where social polarisation contrasts those living at the periphery in derelict blocks of flats or shanty houses to those whose lives are somehow secure in the comfort of world-class gated communities and gigantesque houses. In Johannesburg and its environs, the scenario is equally similar. The city centre has undergone major changes since the country officially abandoned the discriminatory policy of apartheid. In the 1990s, as apartheid began to collapse, laws banning the black majority in cities were first ignored and thereafter completely revoked. But when the blacks started to move into those areas, most white people started leave the areas. It was a form of de-gentrification although more of a “white flight” in the South African context.

#### **4. Refugees’ lived experiences vis-à-vis socio-spatial polarisation**

I had an opportunity to speak to one of the informal traders, Kigeri<sup>4</sup>, a 29-year-old man who owns a “dealership” in downtown Bellville. Kigeri is a refugee from Burundi. He is persuaded that the beauty of Bellville is the plurality of its demographics. Having graduated with his first degree at the University of the Western Cape a while back, Kigeri pushed my memory aback in history reminding me that South Africa as a whole has experienced major waves of immigration throughout modern history. This explains why the city of Cape Town and most of its environs are “full of immigrants”, as he puts it, starting from the early Dutch settlers and the subsequent French Huguenots, then the British colonialists, to the imported slaves from India and Malaysia; this, without counting those from other African countries who still come down to South Africa for asylum seeking or for greener pastures. In his own words, Kigeri had this to say:

People here don’t know that even the French Huguenots, who are the ancestors of some Afrikaans families, also came here as refugees.

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4 Names used throughout in this research are mere pseudonyms for the purpose of protecting participants’ identity.

They were also running away from persecution, just like all of us, because of the war of religion in Europe; and they came to live here. You see? Here in Cape Town everyone is a refugee my friend ... black or white.

Like Kigeri, most refugees trading in South Africa do so informally. Their small trades prove to be effective and thus a valuable means for improved livelihoods in the face of challenges bred by their state of being refugees. Whether pushed from their countries by the persecution clause of the 1951 UN Convention, or pulled to South Africa by the “better opportunities” factor, a number of refugee informal traders have accumulated enough resources to even relocate from Bellville or Hillbrow to some of the most preferred and expensive outskirts of Cape Town or Johannesburg. Thus, in spite of the challenges that refugees encounter, there are those who live as “millionaire migrants” as David Ley (2010) observes. That is, many asylum-seekers rely on income generation in the informal sector, which puts them in a conflicting situation with local authorities, many of whom remain oblivious of refugees’ rights (Bickford-Smith, 1995).

Bellville is “home” to a large number of African refugees. They unquestionably play an important role in the informal business sector of those neighbourhoods and thereby contribute to the growth of the local economy (Atkinson, & Bridge 2005). There are places in these areas known for their major African cities due to the predominance of the foreigners in such places. One will easily find places called Abuja or Lagos in Hillbrow, Johannesburg, or a place called Mogadishu in Bellville, Cape Town. Evidently, Abuja or Lagos are so named due to predominance of Nigerian migrants in such areas while Mogadishu is a busy marketplace so named due to the predominance of Somali merchants in the area and a few migrants from Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Although it would be a fallacy to presume that all those trading in Mogadishu engage in illegal activities, Dasfin, a 34-year-old man from Ethiopia who lives as a refugee in the country believes that not everyone doing business there is doing so justifiably. He goes as far as questioning the presence of some refugees in South Africa and insinuates that “my friend, many people here they lie ... they are not political refugees because of what is happening in their country ... they are not; they are just busy with other

stuff ...” Dasfin continues saying that, “You never know ... and they are very dangerous because they don’t want you to know what they are busy doing”. Dasfin’s allegations provide insights to the level of suspicion among refugee themselves, which often results in rivalry (that could turn violent at times) between the different refugee communities and/or individuals. In the same vein, Muzinda, a 48-year-old refugee man from Rwanda, confirms thus:

There is no unity among us as refugees here, instead of loving one another and supporting each other we kill each other ... That’s bad! Some refugees ... they have connections with people up there; that is why they can get away with whatever they do.

Muzinda seems to indicate that the network of illegal activity in Bellville is very complex and goes as far as the upper echelons at government level. Muzinda has lived in South Africa since 1995 just after the genocide in his home country. He has a local wife with whom they have four children. Refugee migrants receive little (or no) support with regard to securing space for housing, employment, or skills training (Nyamnjoh and Brudvig 2014). In the absence of local government welfare support, migrants depend on support from religious organisations, NGOs and informal networks. For example, during the May/June 2008 and the April-June 2015 xenophobic attacks, churches, mosques and various places of worship became temporary shelters for hundreds of refugees. They housed large numbers of refugee victims of the attacks and were most able to provide care and resources.

As observed in Bellville, it is the lack of investment in buildings and public spaces that makes tenancy by people with low income possible. Affordable accommodation is becoming scarce and in some other places, like the inner Bellville city, non-existent. The *in*-migration of lower income tenants, among them, a great number of African refugees, is among the factors that cause most whites to gradually leave the areas. Their coming is basically channelled by pursued profitability in the CBD, the exclusive opportunity for trading informally or the possibility to vend small items on the streets, as well as the convenience of inexpensive property. This revolution of socio-cultural plurality has given rise to a considerable amount of *out*-migration by previous residents, mostly whites. African refugees live in temporary

conditions and they often find themselves dislocated and evicted as they seek to find space for themselves and to have their place in the wider social order recognised. Bellville is an area that embodies the dream of the post-apartheid South Africa as Zvenyimba, a 25-year-old Zimbabwean woman, who sells small comestible items such as sweets on one of the main streets, says with a smile, “this is the new South Africa, in Bellville every country is here ... I think Nelson Mandela would love this place.”

Through the process of gentrification, the wealthy occupied the city and most of the surrounding areas – giving rise to the eviction of the poorest populations. If the analysis of the globalisation of lifestyles is used to describe global social facts, it greatly rubs out (and too quickly) the roughness of the various territories it takes as its object, observing the entire city centre and its surrounding areas in terms of a single dynamic: their gentrification. However, by dispensing with the theory, the analysis of a real space reveals that things are not going so clearly in real life. Cape Town and Johannesburg are now, like many South African cities, in the process of (re) constructing the identity of its “rainbowness” in order to make sense of its redevelopment of urban centres as spaces of mobility, interactions and encounters – and this can only be possible through de-gentrification. Mr. Kiboko, a 42-year-old Congolese refugee, voiced out his resentment in one of our focus group discussions this way:

If they don't want us here, they can just say it. In this country a refugee is treated like a dog. We're living very, very bad life here. Like me, look, I sleep with my wife and all my children in one room; in the other rooms there are other people there with their children also. You see? What's that now? We can't do nothing... that's how we live ... we must do car guard to pay the rent! We don't have nice jobs; we don't have nothing because they treat us like f\*\*\*ing s\*\*t. They can just tell UN to take us overseas ... yeah ... It's very, very bad here. Us refugees we don't have a place here in this community ... they call us *makwerekwere*

Mr. Kiboko's story tells of the lived experiences many refugees living in Bellville are subjected to. His storyline indicates that a great number of refugees have the idea (and hope, perhaps) that they would get protection and/or third country resettlement based on the international convention

regulating the problems of refugee migrants to which South Africa is party. The description of Mr. Kiboko's experiences provides pointers to the fact that refugee migrants live in residences (usually in blocks of flats) where they pay the rental fee to a property owner. In Mr Kiboko's case, he rents out the two rooms to two different families for a slightly higher price so he could pay a bit less. The payment for his three-roomed flat is R5 500; he, whose name is known to the flat owner, is the "main tenant". He occupies one room and pays only R1 200 and those other two families pay the rest equitably. They then share the kitchen space and other facilities for public convenience.

Needless to say, most of the structures in which refugees live are usually decrepit and some are even abandoned. Thus, the owners of the flats in the building spend little or nothing to take care of the properties. In some cases, as it is in the case of Mr. Kiboko, the owner takes in more tenants (usually refugee migrants) and subdivides the flats into even smaller units with "triplex" card boards. As a result, the space becomes overcrowded causing health problems and a number of other social ills such as criminal activities. The buildings depreciate and the neighbourhood devaluates in terms of its status in the market, which results in the affluent residents opting to leave the neighbourhood for other places, where the environment acclimatizes with their standard.

## **5. Refugee migrants and de-politicisation of spatial patterns**

The context of a place is important to understand the meaning of space and the role people play in creating a space. According to Nyamnjoh and Brudvig (2014), space-making is a shared task shaped by the interests of varied classes, different perspectives, and other competing forces. Bellville is in concert with the innovative dynamism of transnational migrants, whose networks have driven them to build a social community of their own. The space they occupy in mainstream South African society now has different standards and new meanings. According to Paasche (2012:52), South Africans arguably do not fully grasp the notion of public space for the reason that space in South Africa has always been racially segregated since 1652 (referring to the supposed landing of Jan van Riebeeck in what became known later as Cape Town). Since then, different races in South

Africa have always been living justifiably in completely different worlds, making inequality and prejudiced spatiality a norm. In view of this, it could be argued that both the meaning and experience of public space is a new idea that came with the democratic South Africa after the abolition of the apartheid system.

Critical reflections on the right for space and on the way such right ought to be expressed by various people are a new phenomenon as they began to develop in the post '94 South Africa (cf. Booyens 2012). Since discourses on the right for public space are increasingly taking prominence, population groups of so-called “lower class” such as refugee migrants are also starting to establish themselves in order to move from the periphery and find space in the mainstream zone and thereby facilitate their own integration (Atkinson, & Bridge 2005). Nevertheless, discussions and analyses on the occupancy of space in South Africa often result in ethical concerns about social polarisation. This is due to the country’s history of apartheid and, particularly, the forced removals of blacks from their original residences to the peripheral ones.

As it were, the apartheid administration ratified residential segregation of all ethnic groups across the South African space on the basis of their racial characteristics. Such socio-spatial geopolitics of residential segregation was sadistically imposed on the people by way of forced removals of existing residents from their spatial domicile, and the consequential demolition of racially mixed neighbourhoods (Parry and Eeden 2014). The de-officialization of apartheid has since improved the *status quo* as the previously disadvantaged communities are now able to move at will and without obstruction into traditionally “whites-only” areas. This, however, has come with a subsequent trend of whites slowly withdrawing from such areas and moving out of city centres to be secure in the comfort of “safe” suburbs. Thus, the congregation of blacks into the cities has catalysed the flight of whites from those cities, on the one hand, and their avoidance of visiting or going through such areas, on the other. Most South African cities have gone through “white flight” and “white avoidance” as a result of de-gentrification in recent years (cf. Booyens 2012).

The most striking impediment to community transformation and growth in social trust in most South African urban cities is the growing gap

between the haves and the have-nots perceived through unemployment and poverty. The emergence of residential premises where people entrust their safety, freedom and security to solidly walled fences with human sentinels and guarding dogs is remarkable in the inner parts of Bellville. Residents of such “gated communities” often abstain from walking around the city centre. The former policy of racial segregation in South Africa seems to have strengthened the solidarity of people of the same racial grouping (Nyamnjoh and Brudvig 2014). Since most black South Africans are *a priori* in solidarity with each other, the pertinent point at issue is now the preservation of that solidarity networks and the extension of it to those blacks of non-South African descent. There is a need to build social relationships in spaces occupied by the refugee community although the refugee status does not allow a refugee migrant to occupy space permanently in South Africa. This is why Nyamnjoh and Brudvig (2014:222) observe that Bellville is a “space of mobility” and therefore “a place shared” by a large number of migrants who have established their businesses there, South Africans who have migrated from various places of the country for work-related motives, including natives and a few passers-by.

Gentrification is a process through which the social and spatial profile of a neighbourhood is transformed for the benefit of a particular layer of the population deemed superior (cf. Clerval 2011:2). This is done through the renovation of properties and the appreciation of material goods. The process exerts pressure on the poor who are forced to leave the area to areas that are a bit cheaper and less in demand. This constitutes a form of residential segregation. Thus, the process of gentrification has an interesting dichotomy highlighting on the one hand, the dynamics of spatial exclusion and, on the other, the complexity of its implications in terms of social transformation. As it were, spatial shifts inherently affect social place. That is, when someone is forcibly removed from their original space, they soon realise that their place in society is of little value. Concerned generally with such socio-spatial changes in urban contexts, gentrification is a serious concern in modern cities (Lees, Slater & Wylie 2010; Atkinson & Bridge 2005); and both Cape Town and Johannesburg are no different. From observation and interview content, it was possible to capture the development of de-gentrification in Bellville. It was evident

that refugees strive to find space and have their place in the mainstream society recognised.

## **6. Theological assessment of gentrification and its impact on the refugee community**

In addition to the challenges that refugees face, they are particularly vulnerable to housing stress given their lack of knowledge of their rights, language barriers, and cultural barriers. A cultural barrier that can cause tension and eviction for African immigrants is their difference of norms in occupancy, with some immigrants and refugees willing to live with many people in their apartment in order to make ends meet without understanding that this may break their lease terms. The lack of immigrant and refugees in stable housing situations is “not just a supply issue” (Nyamnjoh & Brudvig 2014:11). Refugees in South Africa not only face the burdens of marginalisation but that they also encounter systemic barriers that inhibit them from easily accessing services and employment. This explains why refugees accept any job they are offered rather than finding jobs that better suit their skills and needs. In addition to this flaw in the system, there is a problem of a lack of recognition of foreign credentials, in many cases, which results in skilled refugees working for low wages.

During the interviews, participants were asked about things that they do not like about South Africa or things that do not make them feel “at home”. Some of the identified negative themes that emerged include unaffordable housing, racism, and discrimination, and the location of cultural resources in proximity to affordable housing. They all knew of refugees who struggled to pay their rent in their neighbourhood. Many of the interviewees spoke of how the result of this meant that most refugees have to do various jobs including car guards, security, and barbing to be able to afford rental fee. Omar, a 36-year-old Somali refugee characterised this ongoing struggle when he said, “We are living day by day.” Wivine, a 32-year-old Congolese lady said that this stress causes refugees to focus on how to pay rent, saying that when she works with clients who cannot speak English and face additional barriers such as being single mothers, “We got to find a way to survive and live comfortable in South Africa” Bukuru, another lady from Burundi aged 36-year-old described some of the negative experiences she

has had with the lack of affordable housing South Africa, stating that her family was

... coming to a point where we are thinking about how can we raise our kids here? We work only for rent. Imagine someone with skills, Bachelor degrees, and skills, who can speak many languages. If I'm complaining...what about our new arrivals with no English at all? No skills that are valued here on the market? What about them? What about them? They are really suffering.

These cries of refugees are indicative of the negative impact of gentrification on the refugee community in south Africa. They further tell of the urgent need to de-gentrify communities so that all may live in unity and solidarity. An interesting phenomenon was described where refugees themselves contributed to gentrification and their own displacement from Bellville apartments. The tension between refugees not making enough money to live in Bellville and being displaced was brought to my attention during the course of the interview by one of the interviewees who indicated that refugees themselves contributed to the rising rental prices in the apartment complex. All the respondents knew of refugees within their neighbourhoods who had to relocate due to rising rental prices. All of the locations that people were moving to were thought of as more affordable, and many were often in rural locations. Some refugees spoke of their community members moving to other provinces including the Free State, Mpumalanga, Limpopo, Durban, Port Elizabeth, etc.

God wants humanity to flourish and be good stewards of this world using available resources (Msabah 2016; Msabah 2018a). He made equitable ecosystems that allow everything and everyone he created to flourish. We are therefore expected to bring the best out of all that God created, using the gifts given us. It is a call for a radically flourishing society. As it were, gentrification is to some extent a direct affront to the cultural and socio-spatial mandate that God has given humanity. This is because gentrification is the influx of wealthier residents into a neighbourhood – a movement that results in the forced and involuntary displacement of existing residents – and which affects their history, culture and even their identity. Thus, gentrification lacks justice and equity because it does not fully value the image of God in displaced communities. All that it does is getting rid of

the old community to make room for the new occupants; getting rid of the poor to welcome the rich; and this, without any possibility of coexistence between them (Msabah 2018b; Msabah & Bowers-Du Toit 2017). So, instead of tackling the fundamental problems of poverty and the societal scourge we find ourselves in as a community in a more equitable way, gentrification simply aims at getting rid of the poor and pushing them farther to the margin. This is not God's plan for community transformation.

From a development point of view, gentrification is said to be a “necessary evil” since it brings perceived transformation. The argument is that when rich residents move into a neighbourhood, they invest. As a result, public spaces are renovated, property taxes increase, capital projects such as street paving and sidewalks are increased, and public schools or hospital receive more money from the local government (Dorman, 2014.). However, from a theology of development point of view, the practice of gentrification is inherent of serious forms of injustices such as the displacement of the original residents, the disturbance of their history or even the interruption and abandonment of their traditional way of living. Gentrification therefore encourages a culture of valuing the rich than the poor; a culture of highly regarding people with higher incomes and criminalising those earning less (Ley, 2010). Gentrification tends to think of the poor as a social challenge to be eradicated and those who are well off as the measure of what it means to be human (Lees, 2010).

This explains why de-gentrification is a desirable practice from a theology of development point of view because gentrification is clearly not based on the equity that God desires. That is to say, gentrification does not do the will of God and is not part of the work of restoration, redemption and renewal that God expects of us. It could be argued that gentrification is inherent in a development system and spirit strangely similar to that of apartheid or colonialism. It is a system of domination that does not consider the people, the culture and the history of a place. It is a dehumanizing system that values property more than the people. God wants his justice and equity to be greatly multiplied throughout the world. He desires the earth to be filled with his glorious presence and righteous laws so that everything and everyone and everything will flourish.

## **7. Conclusion**

Space has a major impact on refugees' wellbeing. That is, where people live, work, play, etc. can affect their wellbeing. Socio-economic status and living arrangements are among the dynamics that create discrepancies in the health and wellbeing of a given community. In this regard, the process of gentrification can breed several consequences that contribute to disparities among special population groups including the poor, women, children, the elderly, and even members of minority groups such as, in this case, refugee migrants. Thus, refugee migrants in South Africa, and particularly those living in the Bellville area, are at increased risk for the negative consequences of the process of gentrification. This has a major impact on their hope for the future in spite of their multiple efforts to improve their own livelihoods and wellbeing. Studies indicate that vulnerable populations, such as refugees, typically have shorter life expectancy, a higher rate of disease, an unequal share of residential exposure to hazardous substances, and limited access to affordable healthy housing, healthy food choices, transportation choices, quality schools, etc.

As it were, the old popular neighbourhoods have lost their original population, which was replaced by immigrants from elsewhere in the country or afar throughout the continent. The overriding impression is however that Bellville is a fairly popular area where immigration in its full sense is a strong reality. It cannot be overemphasised that the history of removals in Cape Town neighbourhoods left a legacy that the current government is still striving to change. Although deemed as a new form of colonialism by some, gentrification is a symbol of hope to those who consider it as a process of urban regeneration. However, to refugee migrants living in Bellville, Cape Town, the process of gentrification is purely a deferral of their hope in many ways. This is because Bellville reveals the realities of interconnected local and global hierarchies of being, belonging, becoming, and how they emerge in a world of accelerated mobility against all odds.

Community transformation should not occur at the expense of some people in the community. People do need to be forcefully displaced in order to make way for new development projects in a neighbourhood. There is another way to develop a neighbourhood fairly. It is a way of that

honours the people, history and culture of a place. It is community-based and deeply participatory. It is development without displacement. There is hope for all the neighbourhoods in crisis in South Africa. We can creatively eradicate poverty without just transferring it to another neighbourhood. Especially for neighbourhoods that are still inhabited by people with skills, talents and desires. People who want to stay in places that their families have called home for several generations.

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