

This City is not for us

By Iviwe Pakade

The City of Cape Town is one of South Africa's most polarising cities in current day. For some, it is the picture perfect destination with iconic mountain ranges, gorgeous beaches, an incredible food and wine space, a budding entertainment and night life industry and beautiful properties in world class neighbourhoods. However for others, the city is a constant reminder of South Africa's many issues such as its unemployment rate, inflation rates, and the deeply unequal society which South Africa is due to its past and failure to create necessary change in the present.



The Mother City (Photo by [Tobias Reich](#) on [Unsplash](#))

In conversation with a few people across the city, stories began to emerge showcasing the complicated nature of the relationship South Africans have with the city in which present attitudes and past actions collide to unveil an uncomfortable reality.

The first time you realised living in Cape Town was different for people of colour.

For Zandile Mnci (19) it was going to a restaurant with her family that put things into perspective. “Essentially we were treated different than the white people at the restaurant. We weren't getting service and stuff like that.”

Mnci’s experience at a Cape Town restaurant is unfortunately not a new one with many people taking to social media as well to voice similar complaints. One user commented on a video discussing their experience at a popular restaurant stating “The staff, including the manager, were not only unfriendly but also blatantly displayed their racist behavior.”

Experiences such as these have created an environment where in democratic South Africa, the average person of colour living in the city still needs to know their place. These stories echo in the walls of the high rise buildings and new high end restaurants which fill the spaces of homes and cultures now eroded into memory. For outsiders this is revitalisation, for residents this is erasure.



Camps Bay restaurant strip (Photo by @capetowngetaway on Instagram)

How was your neighbourhood growing up? How does it compare to now?

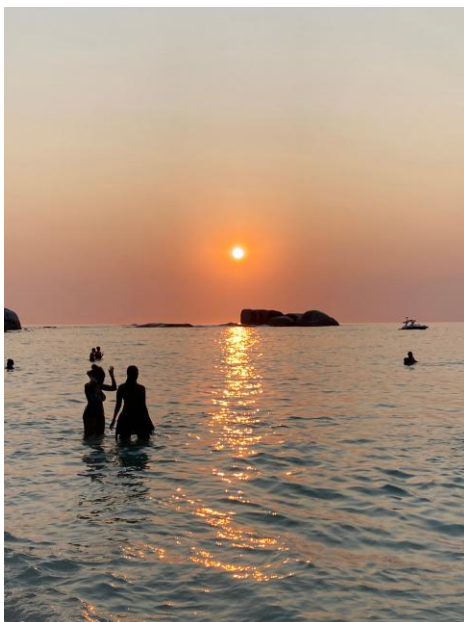
For Asiphe Matroko, an 18 year old Cape Tonian who grew up in one of the city's most notorious townships (Gugulethu), home was a comforting place with the minor distraction of police presence. “When I was growing up, my neighborhood looked and felt like home apart from the crimes and police vans and police coming up to random homes in my area, things

felt at peace and had perfect harmony for some reason.” Though having many fond memories of the past, Matroko has noticed deep changes within her old neighborhood. “It’s a lot quieter now than ever before. I recognise faces of people I used to play with growing up and we now pass each other as though there was never a time we were up in each other’s faces. It’s so bland and quiet now, practically unrecognisable.”

The shifts in Matroko’s neighborhood can be felt across the city. Cape Town, once a city full of promise and built by community, fades into a clinical rhythm where everyone is too proud, too busy and ‘too cool for school.’

Moments you felt out of place.

There is no feeling other than feeling unwanted or out of place that every human can relate to more. Matroko recounts the spaces she feels most out of place in the City of Cape Town. “At restaurants or at the beach especially on a day where it’s not that busy. You keep getting these stares man that feel off.” When asked to delve deeper into what about these spaces feel unwelcoming she continues, “sometimes at those places the smiles people give you – obviously you smile at strangers or greet but their smiles don’t seem genuine. You look away for a split second after and immediately see the smile drop.”



Clifton 3rd Beach Sunset (Photo by Iviwe Pakade)

Expanding further on her thoughts, Matroko states, “Another thing is people saying the K word in these spaces. I thought everyone was past this phase, I thought everyone was past this era but in Cape Town that's not the case in many many areas.”

These moments once again are not uncommon. For Aveyethu Mdedelwa, a 19 year old student of the University of Cape Town, her feeling extends to the entire city. “I realised when the majority of like people of colour were not living in high end places like camps bay.” This of course is partly due to South Africa’s history of Apartheid specifically [the Group Areas Act \(1950\)](#) which prohibited the coexistence of people of different races in the same neighborhoods and led to many forced removals across the country with the most prominent example in Cape Town being the story of [District Six](#). As a result, neighborhoods across South Africa, which still carries the legacy of Apartheid, are often predominantly housed by specific racial groups and the added expense of purchasing property in predominantly and historically white neighborhoods remains a barrier for most people of colour wanting to gain access to those spaces.

Moments you have felt included.

Religion and faith is the cornerstone for most families of colour across South Africa. When asked what spaces she felt included within Cape Town, Mdedelwa said church. “The churches I had been to when I was still exploring... yeah.” While church felt welcoming, a specific neighborhood in Cape Town took top spot for the young woman. “Parkwood. It's this coloured neighborhood type of place. It makes me feel at home because I grew up around coloured people who were like in my early years. I learnt a lot of stuff there. It just reminds me of where I came from.”

It is sentiments like these, moments of shared community amongst different races, which offers solace in what feels like trying times for many people in the City of Cape Town. Mnci recalls a moment of community which made her feel safe and included. “This was when I went out with my friends for the first time. We were just hanging out. I just felt like I was around people who understood me. I actually felt like I belonged somewhere.” Through these moments, the essence of what once made Cape Town shine became clear. It wasn’t the architecture, or the views but the people.

Moments that made you realise who the city was designed for.

Following her heartfelt recount of her first experience of Cape Town nightlife, Mnci recounts a moment which made it clear for her who the City was designed for. “When I went to Camp’s Bay with my parents, I noticed that those spaces were made for Europeans or people with money in general you know. People who can afford such lifestyles.” When asked to unpack how she felt in that moment she simply stated, “out of place.” The sentiment of Cape Town only existing for the wealthy, is one often echoed by many South Africans. Unfortunately however, it is one which is not completely unfounded as South Africa is ranked the country [with the biggest wealth gap in the world](#). With Cape Town leading as [the most expensive city in South Africa](#) to live in, many South Africans have been left to feel as though their Rand has no worth here and a Dollar or Euro is the only solution starting a subtle exodus of South Africans from Cape Town

In 10 years, if nothing changes about the city of Cape Town, what will stories like yours sound like then?

“Honestly, they would just become the everyday story.” Mnci laments. When asked the same question Matroko sighed heavily and stated, “They will sound like lies or like you're trying to stir up trouble which would honestly be a damn shame because what do you mean I’m telling you someone called me the K word and you're like ‘Oh! Well thats normal’.” Finally Mdedelwa remarks, “I feel like stories like mine will seem like they come from a point of struggle.”

The City of Cape Town remains a beacon of what proper investment into development of urban spaces, technological advances and green initiatives which maintain much of the city's most iconic nature sites can do for a city in the African context. It also remains a beacon of reminder that when we fail to address the issues of the past and erect systems which maintain those barriers, the very people who built the city may be pushed out. Through the eyes of Asiphe, Aveyethu and Zandile, the stark reality of what it means to be black in the City of Cape Town is clearer than ever. These stories beg the question which we must never stop

asking: If this city is not for us, who is it for? Will it remain for those with wealth or will the Mother City finally reclaim her own?