

“We occupy to show the failure of the state to house its citizens” says Cissie Gool House activist.

By Amogelang Zungu

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In the heart of Cape Town’s bustling city centre, where luxury apartments rise against skylines, many face evictions and homelessness. According to [Voice of the Cape](#), approximately 500 residents received eviction notices in September 2025 alone. The fight for land and housing is deeply rooted in the City’s history of spatial apartheid. Reclaim the City, a grassroots movement, is at the forefront of the battle, challenging policies that deepen inequality and demanding housing for working-class communities.



(Cissie Gool house is now home to nearly 900 residents who would have otherwise been homeless. Photo by [Ndifuna Ukwazi](#), 2024)

The social movement emerged in 2016 in response to Cape Town’s escalating housing crisis. Under the banner “Land for people, not for profit”, the organisation is spearheaded by tenants and workers advocating for an inclusive and people-centred urban development and an end to the displacement of evictees to areas outside the city. For decades, working-class Black and Coloured families were pushed to the outskirts, far from economic opportunities, while inner-city land was reserved for the wealthy. Today, nearly three decades after democracy, those inequalities remain and, in some ways, they’ve deepened. Gentrification in areas like Woodstock, Salt River, and Sea Point has driven up property prices, forcing long-time residents to move out of their homes and communities.

Bevel Lucas, a resident at Cissie Gool House, part-time Office Bearer at Reclaim the City and one of the leaders of the Cissie Gool House occupation, has a deeply personal connection to the occupied space. His small room in the former Woodstock Hospital once served as a consultation room where he collected his diabetes medication in the early 2000s. Reflecting on

the occupation, he explains “We use the word “occupation” as a way to politically express the dire need that people face in being able to access formal housing and to express the crisis that is the failure by the state to deliver formal adequate housing to its citizens”.

Since the occupation in 2017, the City of Cape Town has made little effort to work with the residents, choosing instead to pursue evictions and treat the residents like criminals. Cissie Gool House was earmarked for affordable housing in 2008, but no construction has begun. City officials have long blamed the occupation for the delays, despite commissioning a report confirming that redevelopment could proceed without evicting current residents. Still, no progress has been made, and the city has yet to initiate discussions with residents to find a way forward.

Reclaim the City has also been involved in high profile legal battles, including the Tafelberg case, where they challenged the sale of public land in Sea Point to a private school. The organisation, together with Ndifuna Ukwazi (NU), argued that the land be used for affordable housing instead. The decade-long case has seen victories being claimed on both sides by the City and RTC/NU. On 31 August 2020, the Cape High Court declared the sale of the Tafelberg site unlawful. However, the province and the city appealed to the Supreme Court of Appeal, which overturned the High Court’s ruling in April 2024. The matter is now before the Constitutional Court, which heard arguments on 12 February 2025 and has reserved judgment. The site has since then been earmarked for affordable housing.

The court’s ruling will have significant implications for how provincial and local governments handle state-owned land and address affordable housing in Cape Town. For Lucas, the Tafelberg site is central to undoing spatial apartheid. “Tafelberg creates the possibility for black workers to live close to their workplace with their families” he explains.

However, he notes that lengthy court delays have had a damaging effect. “Delays in the legal process increases the value of the property, which decreases the possibility of affordable housing for low-income people” he says. The City of Cape Town currently defines “affordable housing” as homes for households earning between R2,000 and R22, 000 a month. But Lucas says that this excludes some of the city’s most vulnerable workers, particularly those employed by the municipality on short-term contracts, such as participants on the Expanded Public Works program, who earn less than R2,000, and are employed for only three to six months a year.

With the Constitutional Court yet to deliver its ruling on the Tafelberg case, the future of affordable housing in Cape Town hangs in the balance. For residents of Cissie Gool House, years of uncertainty have come with little clarity from the City, even as property prices rise and eviction threats looms. Whether the ruling will pave the way for inclusive housing policies or deepen existing inequalities remains to be seen, but for now, the residents and people all over Cape Town waiting for affordable housing continue to wait.

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